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11-2018

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Kim Werth

Concordia University - Portland

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Concordia University – Portland

College of Education

Doctorate of Education Program

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A Phenomenological Study on the Role of Teacher Mentor Programs on
Educator Careers: Perspectives From Across the Career Continuum

Kim T. Werth

Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the faculty of the College of Education

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in

Higher Education

Floralba A. Marrero, Ed.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee

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Concordia University–Portland

2019

Abstract

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences and perspectives of teachers from across the career continuum regarding teacher mentor programs. Thirteen teachers from different stages of the teacher career continuum took part in the study. The conceptual framework for this study focused on high teacher attrition rates among early-career teachers as a primary factor in present and projected shortages in the United States. Associated with the conceptual framework is Vygotsky's sociocultural theory which supports the notion that new teachers learn about their profession through interaction and collaboration with their mentors, fellow teachers, and other professionals in the school community. In order to examine the lived experiences and perceptions of teachers who participated in teacher mentor programs during their first year of teaching, the researcher employed questionnaires, interviews, and a focus group discussion. The use of the transcendental phenomenological method provided for the in-depth study of a group of persons who all experienced the same phenomenon. The goal was to develop an overall description that represents the lived experiences of all the participants regarding teacher mentor programs. Three major themes and eight subthemes emerged from the study (a) district-mandated requirements with subthemes: mandatory meetings, required assignments, and feedback, (b) mentor compatibility with subthemes: physical accessibility, approachability, and friendship, and (c) mentor capability with subthemes: knowledge and experience, and preparedness. The findings of the study provide extensive insight into the role of teacher mentor programs on educator careers.

Keywords: early-career teacher attrition, teacher mentor programs, new teacher induction

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to God, who makes all things possible, and to my brothers, Dung Vuong and David Kotolup, to whom I owe so much.

Acknowledgements

I want to acknowledge my siblings. We grew up during a time when the world was wholly different. We struggled through and overcame the challenges, heartache, and complexities of being immigrant children. The American dream was not only something we sought after, but something we pushed each other to achieve. When I look on the past, my memories are filled with loving and joyful images of my two brothers with whom I took every difficult, frightening, and exciting step that presented itself. Thank you to my “big” brother, Dung Vuong, who made this achievement possible through his exceptional support, indescribable generosity, and never-ending encouragement. His undying spirit, passion, strength, and ability to overcome what others might consider to be game-ending obstacles pushed me to work hard and never give up. Thank you to my “little” brother, David Kotolup, whose selfless sacrifices continue to humble and overwhelm me. In the darkest moments of the past several years, I did not give up because he would not let me. There is nothing he would not do for those he loves and those fortunate enough to call him son, brother, uncle, and friend are better people for knowing him.

I also I want to thank my husband, Doug Werth, for encouraging me to dive headlong into this adventure. His strength carried us through to the end. Thank you to my children – Taylor, Andrew, and Shelby Memmott, and Patrick Werth – for challenging me to always be and do my very best. Thank you to my mother, the strongest and most courageous person I know. Thank you to my students – past, present, and future – whose spirit, energy, and incredible passion for life bring me back to the classroom time and time again. And finally, thank you to my faculty adviser, Dr. Floralba A. Marrero, who believed in me, prayed for me, and shared her invaluable wisdom with me.

To all of these wonderful and amazing people, I am forever grateful.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction to the Problem

The teaching profession in the United States underwent drastic changes in the 1990s and 2000s. In 1998, the average teacher had 15 years of experience (Lehman, 2017). By 2008, however, the average teacher had only one year of teaching experience (Lehman, 2017).

Researchers and educational leaders alike often view these statistics as indicators of troubling trends in the U.S. education system. One of these trends is the shortage of teachers in elementary and secondary schools (Suchter, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). Many administrators lack the ability to recruit, train, and hire highly qualified teachers to fill vacant positions. Unmet staffing needs continue to raise concerns about a teaching crisis that negatively impacts student learning and achievement (Suchter et al., 2016).

Vacant teaching positions go unfilled for a variety of reasons. Often, vacancies exist in schools located in high poverty settings and within STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) content areas (Suchter et al., 2016). Administrators facing difficulties in filling these vacant positions elect to hire less than highly qualified teachers that lack sufficient training or appropriate licensure (Suchter et al., 2016). Increases in the number of alternative teacher certification routes make it possible to expedite the entire teacher preparation process (Suchter et al., 2016). Streamlining the entire teacher preparation process, however, potentially produces inadequately trained teachers who are unprepared to take on the rigors of teaching. Researchers offer conflicting reports regarding the actual number of teachers who leave the profession (Harfitt, 2014). Most researchers agree, however, that attrition rates are highest among early-career teachers (Clandinin et al., 2015).

Callahan (2016) suggested that the magnitude of problems associated with teacher

attrition is best understood in terms of pecuniary loss. In the United States, the annual average cost of replacing a teacher is \$8,000 (Callahan, 2016). Nationwide, schools and districts spend a combined total of approximately \$2.3 billion dollars each year on recruiting, hiring, and training new teachers (Callahan, 2016). Costs related to teacher attrition potentially cause additional damage to districts that already suffer severe budgetary shortfalls.

Nature of the study. This is a qualitative study using a transcendental phenomenological approach. Phenomenology provides for the in-depth study of a group of persons who experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). In this particular study, the researcher examined the lived experiences and perceptions of individuals who participated as mentees in a teacher mentor program during their first year of teaching. In transcendental phenomenology, the emphasis is on the descriptions of the participants' perceptions of the phenomenon, not on the interpretations of their lived experiences (Creswell, 2013). The researcher attempted to collect data from individuals who experienced the same phenomenon in order to construct an overall description that reflects the experiences in full (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, Husserl's concept of universal essence is central to transcendental phenomenology (Dahlberg, 2009). Phenomenology seeks to understand the universal essence of the participants' lived experiences through a reiterative examination process (DeFelice & Janesick, 2015). Dahlberg (2009) defined essence as the structure of essential meanings that explains the phenomenon itself. Without its essence, a phenomenon ceases to exist in the same capacity (Dahlberg, 2009).

This study provided participants with repeated opportunities to reflect on their own lived experiences and perceptions through an open-ended questionnaire, a one-on-one interview, and focus group discussion. The focus group discussion enabled participants to connect with

others who experienced the same phenomenon. During the focus group discussion, participants moved from a place of personal subjectivity to a place of shared subjectivity, or intersubjectivity (Finlay, 2006). Finlay (2006) explained that intersubjectivity enables study participants to engage in meaning-making as a collaborative effort between individuals that experienced the same phenomenon. In this study, the researcher used a focus group discussion to further promote intersubjectivity among the participants. In-depth analysis of the data collected is grounded in Moustakas' (1994) concepts of bracketing and horizontalization. Bracketing requires the researcher to release any preconceived notions or personal biases about the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Horizontalization gives the researcher the opportunity to highlight significant statements, thoughts, and quotes the participants share and categorize them into clusters of meaning (Creswell, 2013).

Transcendental phenomenology consists of three core processes. The first core process is epoche, or bracketing (Creswell, 2013). Husserl described epoche as a process in which the researcher sets aside his or her personal biases and assumptions in order to give study participants a voice (Creswell, 2013). The second core process is transcendental phenomenological reduction in which the researcher examines the data collected and determines a textural description of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The third core process is imaginative variation. Creswell (2013) explained that imaginative variation provides the researcher with opportunities to develop a structural description of the phenomenon.

The researcher employed three forms of data analysis methods. Attribute coding, a First Cycle coding method, organized information related to biography, job assignment, and placement on the career continuum (Saldaña, 2009). Another First Cycle coding method, InVivo coding, also known as literal or verbatim coding, organized themes that emerged from the

participants' perceptions and lived experiences regarding teacher mentor programs (Saldaña, 2009). A Second Cycle coding method, pattern coding, also known as thematic coding, organized themes that emerged from the study (Saldaña, 2009).

Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework for the Problem

Formal induction processes that utilize teacher mentoring represents one significant response to widespread concerns regarding early-career teacher attrition. Adams and Woods (2015) examined the effects of the Alaska Statewide Mentor Project (ASMP) on the recruitment and retention of teachers in Alaska's rural K–12 schools. The researchers concluded that the mentor project had a positive effect on the retention of teachers (Adams & Woods, 2015). Over a six-year period, retention rates increased from 67% to 77% among new teachers who participated in ASMP (Adams & Woods, 2015). Therefore, program components that promote strong professional support include opportunities to develop new teachers' community involvement as well as peer-support networks (Adams & Woods, 2015).

Researchers present the potential impact of teacher mentor programs on educator careers from a variety of vantage points. Many studies describe both positive and negative components of teacher mentor programs through the eyes of mentors, mentees, and those responsible for development and implementation. A review of the literature demonstrated a necessity for studies that include shared perceptions and lived experiences of a broad spectrum of educators. In a study exploring mentoring experiences through the positioning theory lens, Tan (2013) analyzed the opinions, thoughts, and responses of both new teachers and their assigned mentors.

Similarly, Owen and Solomon (2006) examined the Mentor Teacher Internship Program (MTIP) from the viewpoint of the program's teacher interns and their assigned mentors. The inclusion of both mentors and mentees in the same study assisted the researchers in gaining

deeper understanding about the importance of interpersonal connections (Owen & Solomon, 2006). The insights of teachers from across the career continuum potentially provide a more detailed and layered description of teacher mentor programs. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences and perceptions of teachers from across the career continuum regarding teacher mentor programs as part of formal induction processes.

The conceptual framework for this study is based on the assumption that early-career teacher attrition is a significant contributor of teacher shortages in elementary and secondary schools in the United States. Linked to this conceptual framework is a theoretical framework based on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, a theory that views teaching and learning as socially-situated activities involving human interactions (Bashir-Ali, 2011). The researcher conducted an analysis of the participants' lived experiences and perceptions regarding teacher mentor programs through the lens of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. The examination of participants' lived experiences through the lens of sociocultural theory emphasizes the notion that early-career teacher learning and development also takes place in the external environment of the school setting (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory supports findings that recognize the influence of teacher mentor programs on the development of early-career teachers' skills, abilities, and knowledge as a result of their interactions with individuals and events in the school community (Vygotsky, 1978).

Statement of the Problem

Continued concern in the United States about teaching shortages and early-career teacher attrition promotes the development and implementation of formal induction processes that utilize teacher mentor programs. Teacher mentoring as a primary tool in addressing the needs of new

and beginning teachers potentially curbs early-career teacher attrition rates (Martin, Buelow, & Hoffman, 2015). However, despite literature that demonstrates the positive impact of teacher mentoring on early-career teacher attrition, novice teachers still leave the field at higher rates than their more experienced counterparts (Hobbs & Putnam, 2016; Hudson, 2012). What characteristics of teacher mentor programs, then, do teachers from across the career continuum identify as positive or negative influences on educator careers?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study, therefore, was to understand the lived experiences and perceptions of teachers across the career continuum about their participation in teacher mentor programs as part of formal induction processes. The researcher gained additional clarity regarding the potential influence or impact of teacher mentor programs on educator careers. Through careful data analysis, it is possible to identify the characteristics and components of teacher mentor programs that positively or negatively influence a novice teacher's decision to stay in the profession or leave the field.

Research Questions

Three questions guided this study:

- Research Question 1 (RQ1): How do teachers across the career continuum describe the teacher mentor programs in which they participated as part of formal induction?
- Research Question 2 (RQ2): How do teachers across the career continuum describe their relationships with their assigned mentor teachers?
- Research Question 3 (RQ3): What characteristics of the teacher mentor program in which they participated do mentor teachers across the career continuum identify as positive or negative influences on their teaching careers?

Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study

One phenomenological study on the positive and negative influences of teacher mentor programs on educator careers will not eliminate the country's shortage of highly qualified teachers in elementary and secondary schools. The results of this study, however, may provide educational leadership at the school and district levels with additional insight regarding teacher mentor programs. This insight offers potential assistance in addressing the needs of early-career teachers. A phenomenological approach in this qualitative study gives participants repeated opportunities to share layered and detailed descriptions of their lived experiences as novice teachers in a teacher mentor program. Results of this study also provide educational leadership at the school and district levels relevant information that will assist them in reorganizing or implementing necessary changes teacher mentor programs or new teacher induction processes. Small changes often represent the most significant changes. Implementing small changes at the local level potentially improves formal induction processes for future teachers.

This study presents a unique aspect of early-career teacher attrition. Previous research regarding teacher mentor programs exist, however, the scope of these studies is not inclusive of the lived experiences and perceptions of teachers from across the career continuum. Teachers at different points in their professional careers offer unique wisdom and knowledge to a highly relevant and critical issue in the U.S. education system. The results of this study provide the opportunity to deepen understanding of teacher mentor programs and their impact on educator careers.

Definition of Terms

The researcher provides the following definitions to assist in the reader in understanding nature and context of the study.

Early-career stage. The early-career stage encompasses all new and beginning teachers. For the purpose of this study, based on descriptions presented in previous studies, early-career stage teachers have 1-3 years of teaching experience (Harfitt, 2015; Harju & Niemi, 2016; McGlynn-Stewart, 2015).

Husserl's universal essence. Universal essence is the structure of essential meanings that explains or defines a particular phenomenon. The essence is what makes the phenomenon that particular phenomenon. Without its essence, the phenomenon ceases to exist in the same capacity.

Intersubjectivity. In transcendental phenomenology, intersubjectivity occurs when the researcher brings participants who experienced the same phenomenon together. Participants share their own lived experiences and perceptions and listen to the lived experiences and perceptions of others. Through this shared experience, participants develop a new understanding of the phenomenon (Finlay, 2006).

Late-stage. The late-stage of teaching includes veteran teachers. For the purpose of this study, based on descriptions presented in previous studies, late-stage teachers have 11 or more years of teaching experience (Draves, 2013; Naizer, Sinclair, Szabo, 2017).

Lived experiences. Lived experiences are the first-hand accounts and the perceptions of the participants of the study in direct relation to the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Second-stage. The second-stage of teaching includes experienced teachers. For the purpose of this study, based on descriptions presented in previous studies, second-stage teachers have 4-10 years of experience (Al-Ahdal, 2014; Draves, 2013).

Teacher attrition. Teacher attrition is the rate at which teachers leave the profession (Clandinin et al., 2015; Suchter et al., 2016).

Teacher career continuum. The teacher career continuum is the idea that the entire spectrum of a teacher's career can be divided into distinct stages or phases (Naizer et al., 2017).

Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations

Assumptions. There were several assumptions made in this study. First, it was assumed that all participants practiced honesty and truthfulness in providing information regarding their lived experiences and perceptions of the phenomenon. Second, it was assumed that all participants provided accurate and truthful information regarding their past professional teaching experience, including the number of years of experience they possess. Third, it was assumed that all participants who enrolled in the study followed through with all of their commitments concerning the study and will complete each of the activities of the study in entirety. Finally, it was assumed that all participants of the study will contact the researcher with concerns that arise, including concerns that arise during member checking of data.

Delimitations. The scope of the study includes teachers from across three phases of the teacher career continuum. The first phase of the career continuum is the early-career stage. Early-career stage teachers have at least one full year of experience, but not more than three years. The second phase of the teacher career continuum is the second-stage. Second-stage teachers have at least four years of experience, but not more than ten years. Finally, the third phase of the teacher career continuum is the late-stage of teaching. Late-stage teachers have 11 or more years of teaching experience.

Several delimitations apply to the overall study. First, the study was delimited to teachers from the state of Kansas. This delimitation caused a similar limitation in the study and will be discussed in the next section. Second, the study was delimited to teachers who possessed at least a provisional teaching license. Third, the study was delimited to teachers who participated in a

teacher mentor program as part of formal induction in a state- or regionally-accredited school.

Limitations. Several limitations apply to the overall study. First, since the study included teachers from across the career continuum, those who were further removed from the lived experiences of their induction year depended heavily on memory. Second, the researcher found it challenging to analyze teacher mentor programs that are structurally and philosophically different. Although the study included induction processes in schools located in similar geographical settings, programs varied significantly from location to location. This created challenges in thematic and pattern coding. Finally, the delimitation of teachers from the state of Kansas also created a limitation in the study in that the study was limited to only teachers from the state of Kansas.

Chapter 1 Summary

The researcher designed this qualitative study using a transcendental phenomenological approach. Phenomenology provides for the in-depth study of a group of persons who have all experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). In this particular study, the researcher examined the lived experiences and perceptions of individuals who participated as mentees in a teacher mentor program during their first year of teaching. The study, viewed through the lens of Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, presents in-depth analysis of teacher mentor programs. First, the researcher has the opportunity to reflect on the nature, structure, and possible impact of teacher mentor programs on early-career teacher attrition. Second, the researcher has the opportunity to deepen personal understanding of the actual perceptions and experiences of teachers who all participated in teacher mentor programs during their first year of teaching.

This study consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the topic, presents the problem statement, and provides an overview of the entire study. Chapter 2 includes a

literature review focused on early-career teacher attrition, new teacher induction, and teacher mentor programs. Chapter 3 discusses the methodology used in the study. Chapter 4 presents an analysis and discussion of the data. Finally, Chapter 5 concludes the study with a synthesis of the research findings and provides recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction to the Literature Review

Critics scrutinize public school education for a number of reasons. Concerns over low student achievement, classroom inequalities, lack of funding, and the struggle to hire and retain highly qualified teachers increase concerns regarding the effectiveness of the U.S. public school system. In an effort to address widespread concerns, major stakeholders in public education consider various improvement measures aimed at solving issues related to student achievement. Many researchers believe that U.S. public schools suffer from a teacher shortage of crisis proportions (Suchter et al., 2016). Shortages potentially impact all students, but especially affect schools that serve students from lower-socioeconomic areas and in subjects from the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields (Hagedorn & Purnamasari, 2012).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) grew out of mounting concerns regarding the U.S. public education system's inability to compete at a global level. NCLB focuses on standards-based assessment and calls for greater accountability among teachers, administrators, and school systems (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003). The goal of NCLB focuses on student achievement and endeavors to see every child in the United States achieve high standards regardless of socioeconomic status or ethnicity (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003). Initially, the federal government turned its attention to teachers and required all school districts to ensure that their core content teachers achieve a *highly qualified* status, which means that they hold a degree, have obtained full licensure, and demonstrate subject matter competency (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003). Although no longer a federal mandate, the *highly qualified teacher* designation places teachers under high levels of scrutiny. Some believe that the criticism, largely unfair, puts a strain on the profession itself and contributes to the continued and steady exodus of teachers,

especially novice teachers, from the field.

The most recent recession in the United States resulted in various budget limitations that affected districts' ability to hire sufficient numbers of highly qualified teachers to fill open positions. Unfortunately, the end of the recession failed to improve staffing deficits (Suchter et al., 2016). Administrators continue to struggle to attract, hire, and retain enough qualified teachers fill open positions in their schools and districts (Suchter et al., 2016). Teacher attrition remains a major concern of the U.S. public education system, as evidenced by research which reveals that the teaching workforce is indeed experiencing a teacher shortage in specific settings, such as high-poverty schools, and in certain content areas, such as the STEM subjects (Hagedorn & Purnamasari, 2012).

Although researchers disagree about actual attrition rates, most agree that early-career teachers leave at higher rates than more experienced teachers (Clandinin et al., 2015). Approximately 50% of new and beginning teachers leave the field within the first five years (Clandinin et al., 2015). Researchers also agree that high teacher turnover produces negative outcomes. Ingersoll (as cited in Arnup & Bowles, 2016) stated that both schools and students suffer from high teacher attrition rates. The departure often leads to an interruption in the development and sustainment of trusting relationships between faculty members and results in poor student outcomes (Arnup & Bowles, 2016).

The need to attract, recruit, and retain highly qualified teachers prompts administrators, policymakers, and other major stakeholders in education to consider a wide variety of support strategies. Teacher mentor programs as part of formal induction processes represents one major response to early-career teacher attrition. Many view mentoring as an effective strategy in addressing the needs of new and beginning teachers. Barrera, Braley, and Slate (2009) stated

that research on the topic focuses on efficacy in easing transition, reducing turnover, and promoting work satisfaction. While research supports this viewpoint, attrition rates continue to be highest among novice teachers. Therefore, in conducting this literature review, the researcher hoped to gain a clearer picture of teacher mentor programs and the potential impact of these programs on U.S. elementary and secondary schools. Specifically, the researcher closely examined teacher mentor programs in direct relation to teacher resiliency and confidence, mentor-mentee pairing processes, targeted mentoring approaches, and consideration of alternatives to site-based mentoring approaches.

Attrition among all teachers is concerning, but attrition rates among early-career teachers continues to alarm and concern administrators and educational leaders across the country. Harfitt (2015) stated that although there are widespread discrepancies in the number of early-career teachers who exit the field, evidence supports claims that attrition rates are highest among novice teachers. Swanson (2011) reported that new and beginning leave the field for a variety of reasons, including the inability to manage students and classrooms. Additionally, early-career teachers struggle with juggling hectic work routines and lack the skills and training to deal with diverse populations (Swanson, 2011).

In response to perceived teacher shortages, many colleges and universities create alternative routes to teacher certification. Critics of programs that streamline the teacher preparation process identify these individuals as major contributors to high attrition rates. Some studies report as many as 60% of teachers who enter the profession through alternative certification routes leave the field within the first two years (Swanson, 2011). One primary issue related to the high attrition rates of alternative certification route teachers is the reality that many schools and districts fail to address the unique needs of this particular population (Hung &

Smith, 2012).

Regardless of the elements that contribute to early-career teacher attrition, it is reasonable to say that inexperienced teachers require strong support systems. This seems especially true during the induction year when facing the rigor and challenges of the profession for the first time. Many support the use of mentoring programs as an effective strategy in addressing the needs of new teachers (Kardos & Johnson, 2010). Formal mentoring assists inexperienced teachers in dealing with the overwhelming challenges associated with a constantly-changing educational climate (Kardos & Johnson, 2010). Yet, even with the existence of a multitude of research studies that provide positive reports regarding the impact of teacher mentor programs, high attrition rates still exist among early-career teachers. Critics question the effectiveness of teacher mentor programs and point out that research on the topic fails to document actual participant experiences (Kardos & Johnson, 2010).

Clearly, viewpoints regarding the overall impact of teacher mentor programs on new teacher attrition rates vary depending on the focus and quality of mentoring practices. The inconsistencies related to mentoring practices stem from the lack of standardization of required components. Some schools and districts mandate participation while others allow teachers to decide. Mandatory or voluntary, most view teacher mentor programs as a means to establish supportive and collaborative relationships and connections that ultimately result in improved teaching practices (Cook, 2012).

Determining the characteristics of teacher mentor programs that contribute to increased retention potentially improves the ability to attract, recruit, and retain highly quality early-career teachers. The bulk of research regarding teacher mentor programs focuses on the viewpoints of mentors and mentees. The benefits of decreasing attrition and increasing retention of novice

teachers extend beyond offering a solution to the teacher shortage crisis, however. Efforts to support early-career teachers and to assist them in gaining the knowledge and skills necessary to be effective educators presents far-reaching impacts on the education system in the United States. Eliminating or significantly reducing high attrition rates among early-career teachers requires that educators, administrators, policymakers, and other educational leaders collaborate to determine what is most important.

Therefore, although evidence shows that teacher mentor programs positively impact teachers' first year experiences, high attrition rates among early-career teachers continues to be a reality in U.S. elementary and secondary schools. What characteristics of teacher mentor programs do teachers from across the career continuum identify as positive or negative influences on educator careers? The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences and perceptions of teachers from across the career continuum regarding their participation in teacher mentor programs as part of formal induction processes.

The following literature review begins with an overview of teacher shortages in the United States and teacher attrition as a primary contributing factor to the crisis. Following the overview, the researcher examines four recurring themes in the literature including (a) mentoring supports that build new teacher confidence and resiliency, (b) importance of mentor-mentee pairing, (c) targeted teacher mentor strategies and; (d) alternative approaches to school-based new teacher mentor programs.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study focuses on high attrition rates among early-career teachers as a primary factor in present and projected teacher shortages in the United States. Specifically, the researcher focused on the lived experiences and perceptions of

teachers across the career continuum regarding teacher mentor programs and the potential impact of these programs on their careers. Associated with this conceptual framework is the theoretical framework based on Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory. This theory views teaching and learning as socially situated activities that involve human interactions (Bashir-Ali, 2011). Furthermore, Bashir-Ali (2011) explained that all social interactions are a fundamental part of any educational context.

In examining teacher mentor programs as part of formal new teacher induction processes through the lens of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, one should view the experiences of novice teachers during the induction year, including interactions with their mentor teachers, as learning that takes place through social contact (Bashir-Ali, 2011). Vygotsky (as cited in Bashir-Ali, 2011) posited that learning occurs through interaction with others, objects, and events in the environment. Therefore, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory supports the notion that new teachers learn about their profession through experiences, interaction, and collaboration with mentors, fellow teachers, and others in the educational community (Bashir-Ali, 2011). Their skills, abilities, and knowledge develop as they interact with their peers and collaborate with their mentors.

Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature

Teacher shortages and attrition rates. Formal education for children in grades K–12 in the United States reflects a system in need of change in order to better address the learning needs of 21st century students. Challenges related to instruction, however, represent only one struggle in the U.S. education system. Some major stakeholders in education continue to proclaim, as they have for several years, that the nation's schools are experiencing a teaching crisis of significant and alarming proportions. Hussar and Gerald (as cited in Swanson, 2011) predicted

that between 1998 and 2009, U.S. schools would be deficit approximately 2.7 million new teachers to fill vacancies. They further stated that an additional 200,000 teachers would be needed every year after for the unforeseeable future (Swanson, 2011).

One clear indicator of teacher shortfalls in the U.S. public school system is the increase in the number of emergency permits granted to untrained teachers in various states (Suchter et al., 2016). For the 2014–2015 school year, California issued emergency permits to over one-third of its applicants who applied for teaching credentials and licenses. Many of the teachers granted emergency permits were not enrolled in teacher preparation programs. Additionally, California granted a high percentage of emergency permits to untrained teachers in math, science, and special education and in schools with high populations of minority students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Suchter et al., 2016). As of the 2013–2014 school year, 1,000 Arizona teachers held emergency permits, representing a 29% increase over the previous year (Suchter et al., 2016). Also during the 2013–2014 academic year, Arizona failed to fill vacancies in 62% of the school districts. The positions remained vacant as late as three months into the school year (Suchter et al., 2016).

Several factors contribute teacher shortages. Suchter et al. (2016) described three types of shortages. First, shortages occur at the state-level when issues arise with wages, working conditions, and attrition rates. Second, some states experience subject-level shortages when it becomes difficult to fill vacancies in content areas related to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) (Hagedorn & Purnamasari, 2012). Often, the challenge of finding qualified individuals to teach these subjects results in the hiring of willing, but unqualified teachers. Hagedorn and Purnamasari (2012) reported that untrained teachers instruct approximately 22% of secondary students in the United States.

Acknowledgment that elementary and secondary schools in the United States face teacher shortages represents only one step in understanding why shortages exist. It is critical that educational leaders and policymakers consider the varying contributing factors between states, districts, schools, and teachers themselves. Some researchers believe that the United States suffers from teacher shortfalls because new teachers choose not to teach. Swanson (2011) stated that approximately one-third of all individuals who complete university preparation programs choose to go into other fields other than teaching after graduation. Therefore, teaching shortages result from teacher attrition, not a lack of teacher availability (Swanson, 2011).

Reported statistics offer a detailed picture of teacher attrition. DeAngelis and Presley (2011) noted that female teachers and those who begin teaching at a young age are more likely to leave the profession than their counterparts. Some studies show that White teachers are more likely to leave than Latino teachers, while other studies demonstrate that there is essentially no difference in attrition rates among the different ethnic groups represented in teaching (DeAngelis & Presley, 2011). Location and the student population also serve as contributing factors that attribute to a non-difference between ethnicities attrition.

Feng, Imazeki, and Kirby et al. (as cited in DeAngelis & Presley, 2011) added another dimension to the issue of teacher shortages in the United States. The researcher asserted that the educational level of teachers may determine a teacher's decision to stay in or leave the profession (DeAngelis & Presley, 2011). New teachers with strong academic skills tend to exit the field at a faster rate than new teachers with weaker academic skills (DeAngelis & Presley, 2011). This particular finding creates significant concern among educators and policymakers. However, researchers caution that this finding does not necessarily mean that the most effective teachers are the ones who leave the profession early on in their careers (DeAngelis & Presley,

2011).

Teacher attrition sometimes results from non-measurable factors. Researchers observe unique characteristics of this phenomenon without the ability to describe findings using numerical data. Observation of teacher attrition requires the consideration of the individual teacher's experiences. Each teacher's perceptions and viewpoints reflect his or her own lived experiences. Novice teachers may share some similarities, but the experiences and related outcomes differ in many ways. Langdon (2015) discussed the need to shift mentoring practices to a more educative model that focuses not on the mere acquisition of skills, but on transformational learning. Educative induction, mentoring, and professional development supports teachers as they rethink their own practice in order to construct new roles (Langdon, 2015). Novice teachers who participate in an educative training process during their first year ultimately learn to teach differently and, perhaps, more effectively (Langdon, 2015).

Viewing the potential positive or negative impacts of teacher mentor programs through a transformational lens implies that it is necessary to focus on practices that build confidence and resiliency in early-career teachers. The implication is the most effective way to determine the role of teacher mentor programs on educator careers is to provide opportunities for teachers to describe the challenges they face and the needs that arise from these challenges. The inclusion of teachers from across the career continuum lends unique insight and wisdom to understanding the phenomenon itself.

Mentoring supports that build new teacher confidence and resiliency. Previous research regarding new teacher retention focuses on mentoring practices that build on early-career teacher confidence and resiliency. High attrition rates among new teachers magnify the importance of listening to and understanding the experiences of beginning teachers. Le Cornu

(2013) focused on understanding the experiences of beginning teachers with the intent of addressing the problem of new teacher attrition. Through qualitative critical enquiry, which followed narrative enquiry and critical ethnography, Le Cornu (2013) examined the relationship between individual, relational, and contextual factors that develop resilience in new and beginning teachers. Participants of the study included 60 beginning teachers and their principles. The research team collected data through semi-structured interviews (Le Cornu, 2013). Le Cornu (2013) employed Jordan's model of relational resilience as the conceptual framework for discussion. Jordan's model of relational resilience stems from relational-cultural theory, which suggests that psychological growth occurs within the context of relationships (Le Cornu, 2013). This theory promotes the idea that resilience exists not within an individual, but in the individual's capacity for connection with others (Le Cornu, 2013).

The findings of the study highlighted the importance of positive student-teacher relationships and connectedness with the school community in the development of early-career teachers (Le Cornu, 2013). The findings promoted professional support that recognizes novice teachers as active participants in their own learning, rather than passive recipients (Le Cornu, 2013). Relationships novice teachers shared with their students and colleagues significantly impacted their growth and development (Le Cornu, 2013). Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory supports the notion that new and beginning teachers learn and develop through interaction with others in the school community.

Finally, the findings of Le Cornu's (2013) study promoted peer support as a primary component to the development of resilience in new and beginning teachers. Solid relationships with peers provide valuable sources of emotional support and opportunities for trouble-shooting problems. Through peer support, novice teachers develop the ability to discuss teaching,

collaborate with others, and reflect and share resources (Le Cornu, 2013). Peer support is a key way novice teachers find the strength and courage to continue on during the most challenging times in their early careers. Viewed through the lens of sociocultural theory, it is reasonable to say that peer support, as part of the valuable network of interactions, makes significant contributions to early-career professional growth and success.

Taylor (2013) identified resiliency as a key factor in promoting professional success and retention among new and beginning teachers. Research indicates that many leave the profession due to salary or wage dissatisfaction (Taylor, 2013). Many novice teachers experience lack of support from administrators and other leaders, especially in light of a perceived trend to blame teachers for students' low achievement (Taylor, 2013). Building resiliency in early-career teachers potentially encourages them to remain in the field despite the challenges and rigors of the teaching profession (Taylor, 2013).

The researcher viewed teacher resiliency as the ability to adjust change and to build competence even when faced with difficulties and challenges (Taylor, 2013). The study itself focused on the experiences and perceptions of African American female teachers, with a specific focus on the resilience characteristics that motivated them to stay in the field (Taylor, 2013). The researcher's pursuit of the study stemmed from two main factors: (a) the nation's teacher shortage crisis, and (b) the researcher's own identification with the struggles of female African-American teachers during the desegregation of schools (Taylor, 2013).

Data collection involved the application of Polidore's Theory on Resilience (Taylor, 2013). The resilience theory is based on two main premises which guided Taylor's (2013) research. The development perspective states that an individual develops resilience over time, possibly an entire lifetime, and not according to a set of fixed traits (Taylor, 2013). Second, the

ecological perspective refers to external or environmental influences that impact an individual over the course of a life span (Taylor, 2013). Therefore, resiliency is not only developed over time, but also through the experiences that occur as a direct result of the surroundings in which the individual lives and works. This particular perspective applies Vygotsky's sociocultural theory in that it emphasizes the importance of social interaction and the particular cultural context in which an individual exists (Ryder & Yamagata-Lynch, 2014). In fact, human learning is inextricably tied to both elements.

Three female African-American teachers participated in the study. Through the historical biography method with narrative inquiry technique, Taylor (2013) gave the participants the opportunity to communicate their perspectives in an in-depth manner. The results of the study clearly identified resiliency as a common thread between all the participants (Taylor, 2013). Taylor (2013) stated that the teachers' resiliency sustained them through the challenges of desegregation and kept them in their profession. Developing resiliency involves opportunities and practices that also build confidence. The relationship novices share with their mentors is one way in which resiliency and confidence can be cultivated. It is, therefore, crucial to pay special attention to the pairing of mentors and mentees that have the potential to develop strong relationships over time.

Importance of mentor-mentee pairing. Early career teachers involved in teacher mentor programs view their experiences in a variety of ways. Although their perceptions about the positive and/or negative impact of these programs differ in some ways, most agree that they benefitted from their relationships with their assigned mentors. The mentor-mentee relationship often determines the success of the mentee's first year experience. Hobbs and Putnam (2015) examined the experiences of beginning teachers with a district-employed mentor and emphasized

the importance of the mentor-mentee pairing. The researchers stated that the main responsibility of the mentor is to build relationships that are trusting, respectful, and collegial (Hobbs & Putnam, 2015). The researchers identified three essential characteristics of mentor teachers. Effective mentors openly communicate, listen well, and acknowledge the needs of beginning teachers (Hobbs & Putnam, 2015). Therefore, mentorship calls for the establishment of strong connections between mentees and their assigned mentors because their interactions play a significant role in shaping learning (Hobbs & Putnam, 2015). This idea reflects the same premise as Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, emphasizing the impact of social interactions in the learning process.

Martin et al. (2015) conducted a case study in which they examined the induction experiences of five different teachers. The researchers endeavored to understand their experiences and to learn how to better support early career teachers in order to promote teacher retention and improve student achievement. The researchers employed purposive sampling to select five participants for the study who fell into one of three pre-established categories – certified teachers educated and trained on the mainland United States, locally certified teachers educated and trained in Hawaii, and alternatively certified teachers through the Teach for America program (Martin et al., 2015).

The researchers of the study argued that effective teacher mentor programs provide opportunities for mentors and mentees to build strong, supportive relationships (Martin et al., 2015). Participants communicated that they benefitted from content-focused collaboration with colleagues of the same content (Martin et al., 2015). Participants also expressed that they viewed mentors as resources and confidants, which made them more receptive to mentoring practices (Martin et al., 2015). Thus, new teachers' perceptions regarding mentoring practices and

relationships are extremely important to the success of the overall mentor experience.

Some argue that ineffective pairing or matching strategies potentially cause the novice teacher to miss out on the valuable benefits of a teacher mentor program. In a study examining the mentoring practices of one school district, Lozinak (2016) concluded that the mentees viewed the process involved in the mentor-mentee pairing as negative or ineffective. New teachers in the district who viewed the selection and matching process in a negative light also viewed their entire mentoring experience as ineffective (Lozinak, 2016). The researcher concluded that design and implementation of mentor-mentee matching strategies potentially improve beginning teachers' perceptions of their mentoring relationships (Lozinak, 2016). (Martin et al., 2015). Thus, the perception of new teachers regarding mentoring practices and relationships is extremely important to the success of the overall mentor experience.

Hobson and Maldarez (2013) conducted a study in which they examined the root causes of failure of school-based mentoring. In this particular study, the researchers examined data gathered from interviews with beginner and mentor teachers who worked in primary and secondary schools (Hobson & Maldarez, 2013). The findings supported the argument that the school-based mentoring programs failed to maximize their fullest potential because they failed, in large part, to provide appropriate conditions for effective mentoring practices, including the mentor-mentee relationship (Hobson & Maldarez, 2013). More specifically, the findings suggested that the mentors in the programs under examination failed to create safe, trusting relationships (Hobson & Madarez, 2013). As a result, a majority of the mentees claimed to feel stress due to *judgmentoring* – a term used to describe the negative and restrictive feedback they received from their mentors (Hobson & Maldarez, 2013).

Alternative certification teachers. Teaching shortages in the United States prompted

educational systems to develop and implement processes that employ alternative certification methods (Hung & Smith, 2012). These efforts reflect the desire to create faster routes to teacher certification to fill the numerous vacancies that exist in elementary and secondary public schools across the nation. Those who obtain teaching certification through alternative processes struggle in unique ways in their beginning years of teaching (Hung & Smith, 2012). Hung and Smith (2012) examined the perceptions of new teachers who had been trained through alternative certification methods. All participants of the study expressed fear in their own lack of training and concern over their ability to address the instructional standards related to the NCLB legislation (Hung & Smith, 2012).

Watters and Diezmann (2015) studied the experiences of career-change beginning STEM teachers who left a job in a science-related field in the professional sector for a teaching position in the secondary school setting. In conjunction with the nature of the study, which incorporates a detailed examination of the participants' experiences, the researchers employed a qualitative embedded multiple case study approach to data generation (Watters & Diezmann, 2015). The researchers issued 400 invitations to potential study participants. Fourteen STEM teachers with more than 10 years of experience living within the geographical area participated in the study (Watters & Diezmann, 2015). Watters and Diezmann (2015) drew on Self-Determination Theory (SDT) to assist them in understanding the participants' experiences. SDT proposes that autonomy, confidence, and relatedness are factors that contribute to job satisfaction.

STEM teachers. Early career STEM teachers represent a population of new and beginning teachers who experience attrition at high rates (Watters & Diezmann, 2015). National concern for improved instruction in STEM subjects increases demand for teachers in this field in middle and secondary schools (Jones, Dana, LaFrumenta, Adams, & Arnold, 2016). In a

response to increased need for STEM teachers in their state, researchers from the Education Department at the University of Florida implemented the STEM Teacher Induction and Professional Support Initiative (STEM TIPS). In designing the program, the team conducted a literature review to identify the needs of incoming STEM teachers. Researchers identified needs with lesson planning, classroom management, decision-making, routine school procedures, the coach/mentor-teacher relationship, peer observations, model teaching, administrative support of new teachers, and reflective teaching (Jones et al., 2016). In their examination and evaluation of the program, Jones et al. (2016) concluded that induction support for these beginning teachers required focus on assistance in locating resources specifically aimed at instructional strategies in STEM content areas.

Some educational analysts believe that increasing retention among early-career mathematics and science teachers requires organized and targeted mentoring strategies (Ormond, 2011). Ormond (2011) explored various aspects of effective mentoring practices designed to address the unique needs and concerns of novice teachers in the Early Support Program (ESP). Ormond (2011) collected data through a mixed method approach which employed both qualitative and quantitative components. The mixed method approach to data collection enabled the researcher to establish the general issues related to ESP, while gaining a more in-depth understanding of trends and patterns through a case study analysis (Ormond, 2011). Ormond (2011) concluded that while many effective mentoring practices potentially benefit any teacher, however, individual needs call for specific strategies. Evidence that emerged from observations of the program as well as evidence in literature supported the findings of this study (Ormond, 2011). The researcher stated that previous literature supports the need for training and support with issues related curriculum, instruction, assessment, management, and school

policies. The need for guidance in these areas further magnifies the added complexity involved in supporting novice mathematics and science teachers.

Alternatives to school-based mentoring practices. Many new teacher induction programs utilize site-based mentoring as a primary strategy in addressing the needs of novice teachers (Jones et al., 2016). Site-based mentoring programs present one way to address the unique needs that arise during the first year of teaching, however, these programs restrict the interaction of the mentors and mentees. In an effort to increase collaboration and interaction between mentors and mentees, some schools and districts opt for alternatives to traditional site-based mentoring practices. Two alternative strategies include online mentoring and full-release programs (Fletcher & Strong, 2009; Jones et al., 2016).

Online mentoring. Some schools and districts choose to employ online mentoring, also known e-mentoring. Jones et al. (2016) employed a mobile-ready platform in Florida through the construction of a support program that addressed expressed needs of early-career STEM teachers. The researchers designed the program STEM TIPS in partnership with the University of Florida's Education Department and 18 school districts located throughout the state (Jones et al., 2016). The logic model for the program consisted of three different levels of web-based support, including a community of practice, online coaching, and online instructional resources (Jones et al., 2016). Teacher-users benefited from direct access to content area specialists who served as coaches and from direct access to resources aimed at improving instructional practice (Jones et al., 2016). The researchers conducted a survey in the pilot year of the program which determined that users found the website useful (Jones et al., 2016). The survey also revealed that 34 of 61 identified limited time as a key factor in restricting use of the website (Jones et al., 2016).

Bang and Luft (2014) conducted a case study that examined the year-long learning processes of two first-year science teachers participating in a web-based mentoring program. The researchers explored the patterns of written dialogue between mentors and mentees, documented relevant topics, and illustrated the changes in the classrooms as a result of their participation in the web-based mentoring program (Bang & Luft, 2014). Bang and Luft (2014) concluded that even though the pairs demonstrated different participation patterns, they also demonstrated similar elements in their written dialogue. Important topics related to logistics, processes, instructional methodologies and strategies emerged from the data collected (Bang & Luft, 2014). The overall findings of the study support the idea of online mentoring as a way to tailor teacher mentor programs to meet the unique needs of novice teachers (Bang & Luft, 2014).

In a recent in-depth qualitative case study of an innovative online induction program of the Riverside County Office of Education (RCOE), Mitchell, Howard, Meetze-Hall, Hendrick, and Sandlin (2017) supported the positive impact of online mentoring of new and beginning teachers. The researchers analyzed the insights of 18 novice teacher participants regarding their perceptions regarding the curricular and programmatic demands of their jobs and their need for immediate help from mentors and coaches (Mitchell et al., 2017). Specifically, the researchers focused on participant perceptions regarding classroom needs and their satisfaction of the RCOE induction program (Mitchell et al., 2017). RCOE's online mentoring program for new and beginning teachers provided novice teachers with access to coaches and peers through the use of electronic discussion boards (Mitchell et al., 2017).

The theoretical framework for this study was a four-step model that included extension of knowledge, application of new learning, reflection of research-based practices regarding online mentoring, and collaboration related to coaching conversations, peer feedback, and access

to resources (Mitchell et al., 2017). Findings indicated that program software limited access to online mentoring, but participants remained positive and optimistic about online coaching and mentoring (Mitchell et al., 2017). The researchers supported further development of RCOE and recommended additional research to determine effective online pedagogy strategies (Mitchell et al., 2017). Additionally, Mitchell et al. (2017) recommended further research to assist in the construction of online mentoring programs that focus on collaboration through dialogue. Vygotsky (1978) sociocultural theory supports the strategy of collaboration of through dialogue in that it acknowledges growth through interaction with others.

Full-release mentor program. Full-release mentoring is a common alternative to school-based or site-based mentoring. Full-release mentoring is a strategy that utilizes mentor teachers who have no or limited classroom duties (Fletcher & Strong, 2009). A common characteristic of full-release mentoring involves mentors who supervise multiple mentees (Fletcher & Strong, 2009). Fletcher and Strong (2009) conducted a study in which they examined the potential impact on student achievement of two different mentoring models in one large urban school district. The study developed as a response to the district's desire to improve the support offered to new teachers through the use of a mentoring model (Fletcher & Strong, 2009). One model employed the use of a full-release mentor while the other model adhered to typical site-based practices. Fletcher and Strong (2009) explained that due to financial restrictions, some teachers benefited from full-release mentor programs while other teachers carried out their mentor duties alongside their teaching commitments.

Caseloads varied depending on the responsibilities of the mentors. Mentors who benefited from full-release carried caseloads of 12–15 new fourth or fifth grade teachers, while mentors who mentored and carried out classroom duties benefited from caseloads of one or two

new fourth or fifth grade teachers (Fletcher & Strong, 2009). Through qualitative data collection and the analysis of district-provided assessment data from 2006–2007, the researchers sought to provide a definitive answer to the following question: How do release time and caseload differences relate to changes in class level student achievement? Both groups of mentors received the same controlled professional development training (Fletcher & Strong, 2009).

The results of the study indicated that students of teachers whose mentors received full release showed greater gains than students of teachers whose mentors served as regular site-based mentors (Fletcher & Strong, 2009). The findings suggest that full-release mentors have a greater impact on new teachers compared to site-based mentors, which, in turn, has a positive effect on student achievement. The results of the study implied that effective non-traditional teacher mentor practices significantly impact new teacher attrition and retention. Results also implied that non-traditional teacher mentor practices impact student achievement as well.

Review of Methodological Issues

A review of the literature showed that researchers use a variety of methodological approaches to examine the effectiveness of teacher mentor programs and new teacher induction processes. Achinstein and Davis (2014) and Aslan and Ocal (2012) conducted studies using qualitative approaches. Clark and Byrnes (2012) and Foor and Cano (2012) utilized quantitative approaches. Some researchers determine that the use of multiple methodological approaches in a single study presents a more clearly defined understanding of the topic. Cook (2012) and Barrera et al. (2010) used mixed-method approaches in which they included both qualitative and quantitative elements.

Qualitative approach. Qualitative research provides for the investigation of the

experiences of an individual or group within a particular natural setting (Divan, Ludwig, Matthews, Motley, & Tomljenovic-Berube, 2017). This approach to literature potentially generates an overwhelming amount of information during the data collection process. Qualitative researchers present participants with open-ended questions through a variety of data collection methods including interviews, observations, focus groups, journaling, and field notes (Divan et al., 2017). The data generated must be transcribed, read, reviewed, analyzed, and coded for potential patterns. This is an in-depth approach that provides detailed descriptions. However, qualitative research requires extensive time commitments. Additionally, qualitative studies call for small sample population sizes, which often produce narrow and insufficient results. Critics claim that qualitative studies present overly subjective viewpoints and in a manner that is difficult to replicate (Divan et al., 2017).

Effective qualitative studies provide participants with multiple opportunities to clarify or expound on their responses. Achinstein and Davis (2014) conducted a qualitative study in which they explored an approach to mentoring that focused on developing new teachers' knowledge through practice. This study employed qualitative methodology to incorporate in-depth feedback and input from mentor teachers and others directly involved in the mentoring process. Participant responses provided necessary details and insight to support the claim that effective mentoring programs allow for mentoring in a specific content area (Achinstein & Davis, 2014).

The context of the study focused on a university-based induction program connected to a larger new teacher support organization in California (Achinstein & Davis, 2014). Participants included 16 content mentors and 31 new teachers. Data collection conducted through open-ended questionnaires, focus group interactions, and semi-structured interviews provided researchers with more than enough information to analyze and code for patterns (Achinstein &

Davis, 2014). The results of the study demonstrated the complex role of mentors. First, mentors provide socio-emotional and socialization support to novice teachers (Achinstein & Davis, 2014). Second, mentors assist in the development of new and beginning teachers' content knowledge critical to their professional success (Achinstein & Davis, 2014). Achinstein and Davis (2014) stated that effective mentors possess a complex knowledge and practice base. Data collection provided rich details, however, the study only focused on one case and one induction program. The narrow scope of the study presented highly specific information that potentially fails to benefit a larger population.

Quantitative approach. Quantitative research studies present participants with close-ended questions in an effort to confirm specific hypotheses, measure variations, or determine cause and effect relationships (Divan et al., 2017). Quantitative researchers use tools such as questionnaires, surveys, and structured observations to collect quantifiable data (Divan et al., 2017). Critics claim that quantitative research potentially provides a false sense of precision and accuracy based on numbers (Divan et al., 2017). Critics also claim that quantitative studies fail to consider the differences between people and social institutions and their natural surroundings (Divan et al., 2017).

Clark and Byrnes' (2012) study examined beginning teachers' perceptions regarding mentoring. The researchers used quantitative methodology to determine the level of importance participants placed on specific support strategies (Clark & Byrnes, 2012). The study included first-year elementary school teachers from multiple school districts across a single state in the Rocky Mountain region of the United States (Clark & Byrnes, 2012). Participants received the Mentoring Support Survey which contained 15 items directly related to mentoring supports received (Clark & Byrnes, 2012). The survey required participants to identify the specific

supports and to rate the degree of helpfulness they provided during their first-year of teaching. Researchers assigned each of the responses a numerical value. Numerical data provides for a clear and concrete way in which to determine findings (Clark & Byrnes, 2012). Clark and Byrnes (2012) concluded that novice teachers rated their mentoring experiences higher when they received sufficient release time that allowed for observation of other teachers.

Clark and Byrnes (2012) described multiple weaknesses in their study. First, instrumentation limited participant responses. Instrumentation took the form of a closed-format survey that failed to provide opportunities for participants to qualify or explain responses (Clark & Byrnes, 2012). The use of various qualitative data collection methods such as interviews or journal reflections may have enhanced findings and broadened implications. Second, the researchers also suggested that the length of the total instrument and the busy schedules of the new teachers themselves may have significantly contributed to the low response rate (Clark & Byrnes, 2012). The sample population consisted of 136 new teachers in their first year of teaching. This number represented only 40% of the total number of teachers eligible for the study (Clark & Byrnes, 2012). Third, the sample population reflected a very specific demographic. The researchers reported that 75% of the participants were white and 84% of the participants were female. Therefore, the findings of the study were relevant to a white, female population of teachers (Clark & Byrnes, 2012).

Mixed-method approach. The mixed-methods approach enables researchers to use a wide variety of strategies to better understand a topic of study. Humphreys and Jacobs (2015) described a typical mixed-methods study as an approach that uses data to determine causal effects and at the same time to provide detailed examination of a subject. Critics of the mixed-methods approach state researchers engaged in this type of study fail to set clear parameters for

the aggregation of qualitative and quantitative data (Humphreys & Jacobs, 2015). The inclusion of both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods potentially threatens reliability of the findings, especially if results present contradictory information.

Researchers sometimes require both qualitative and quantitative data in a single study. An effective balance of both types of data provides sufficient information and a broader picture of a particular phenomenon. Cook (2012) examined the perceptions of 97 recent graduate from Governors State University's educational administrative program regarding mentoring (Cook 2012). The researcher collected data through an anonymous survey that asked participants questions regarding their perceptions of their mentors' background and experience and their personal overall experience in the program (Cook, 2012). The survey included two qualitative questions designed to gain a better understanding of the participants' attitudes and perceptions about mentoring, while providing additional opportunities for participants to expand on certain thoughts and opinions (Cook, 2012).

Conclusions. Choosing a methodological approach requires knowledge of the type of evidence needed to fully understand a problem or phenomenon. When researchers desire a numerical value, a quantitative approach provides appropriate data. Researchers endeavoring to learn the insights and perceptions of particular individuals or groups use qualitative data to deepen understanding. Some studies call for the legitimate use of both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. Divan et al. (2017) stated that when employed correctly, a mixed-methods approach provides researchers with the strengths inherent in qualitative studies and the precision of quantitative methodology.

Synthesis of Research Findings

The literature substantiated several claims regarding the impact of teacher mentor

programs on early-career teacher attrition and retention. Previous research indicates that success of teacher mentor programs relies heavily on understanding the perceptions of novice teachers, mentors, school administrators and other educational leaders. Research also indicates that the design and implementation of effective teacher mentor programs take into account the needs of individuals who obtained licensure through non-traditional preparation programs. For certain schools and districts, this requires the implementation of programs that depart from traditional site-based strategies. Digital technology, in the form of online mentoring, provides for greater opportunities to expand knowledge base in specific content areas and opens access to a wider variety of mentors who can address the specific needs of novice teachers.

New teacher perceptions. Addressing the needs of new and beginning teachers begins with listening to their perceptions and learning about their experiences. Clark and Byrnes (2012) examined the perceptions of beginning elementary school teachers regarding the effectiveness of the mentoring supports they received. Researchers used the Mentor Support Survey in the data collection process (Clark & Byrnes, 2012). Clark and Byrnes (2012) stated that the survey employed a scale originally taken from the Total Quality Partnerships Teaching Survey. Researchers based participant responses on a Likert scale ranging from 1–5, with 1 representing a “not helpful” response and 5 representing an “extremely helpful response” (Clark & Byrnes, 2012). The results of the study indicated that the mentoring supports the respondents viewed as most helpful included common planning time and sufficient release time that allowed for the observations (Clark & Byrnes, 2012). Novice teachers who benefited from common planning time as their mentors and release time from their classrooms rated their mentoring experiences significantly higher than new teacher who did not receive the same supports (Clark & Byrnes, 2012).

Brown, Bay-Borelli, and Scott (2015) determined that contextual understanding of high stakes testing and confidence in guiding students through the complexities of state assessments affect first year teachers' job effectiveness and subsequent retention. Many participants described a disconnect between their ideals and the expectations placed upon them (Brown et al., 2015). Brown et al. (2015) stated that novice teachers expressed doubt in their ability to implement effective instructional practices. The study's findings support the notion that success in preparing students for high stakes testing potentially increases new and beginning teachers' confidence in their own effectiveness (Brown et al., 2015). The implication is that novice teachers who perceive their own effectiveness will be less likely to leave the field (Brown et al., 2015). Therefore, it is important to develop a deep conceptual understanding of high stakes testing and reform in order to engage in powerful or effective teaching (Brown et al., 2015).

Mentor teacher perceptions. Mentor teacher perceptions provide unique viewpoints regarding the effectiveness of teacher mentor programs. Foor and Cano (2012) stated that successful mentor teachers understand their specific roles and responsibilities and believe in their own ability to positively impact novice teachers. The findings of the study indicate that mentor beliefs and abilities serve as a primary predictor of the outcome of the mentor-mentee relationship (Foor & Cano, 2012). Therefore, mentor teachers' perceptions contribute to the design and implementation of effective teacher mentor programs (Foor & Cano, 2012).

Barrera et al. (2010) examined the perceptions of teachers regarding effective mentoring practices. Participants in the study identified clearly defined program goals, professional development aimed at content instruction, and classroom release time as essential elements of successful teacher mentor programs (Barrera et al., 2010). Based on participant responses, the researchers concluded that teacher mentor programs benefit from the combined evaluations of all

major stakeholders in the school community (Barrera et al., 2010). Both Foor and Cano (2012) and Barrera et al. (2010) conducted studies that included the participation of new teachers and mentor teachers. The researchers did not emphasize the number of years of experience of each teacher, which may have contributed to a more detailed description of teacher mentor programs.

Administrative involvement and support. Administrators play an important role in the creation, implementation, and success of teacher mentor programs. Pogodzinski (2015) stated that school-level administrators directly influence teacher mentor programs in multiple ways. Administrators possess the ability to influence the mentor selection process, training and support of novice teachers, reduction of obstacles that prohibit collaboration, and program oversight and evaluation (Pogodzinski, 2015). Novice teachers tend to feel more confident in asking for help when they view administrators as strong supporters and advocates. Opportunities for new and beginning teachers to positively interact with administrative leadership help early-career teachers to feel confident and successful in their work (Pogodzinski, 2015).

In examining the specific needs of early-career teachers, Eisenschmidt, Odor, and Reiska (2013) determined that teachers grow increasingly critical of administrative support and cooperation. The supportiveness of the school culture most often determines the success of the novice teachers' first year experience. The overall effectiveness of teacher induction processes relies heavily on administrative actions that equip teachers with the type and level of supports needed to be successful (Eisenschmidt et al., 2013). Overlooking the potential impact of administrators on teacher mentor programs underestimates or devalues the power of their leadership in the school community. Eisenschmidt et al. (2013) concentrated on the perceptions of early-career teachers and failed to highlight the perceptions of teachers from across the career continuum. The inclusion of teachers from across the career continuum potentially lends unique

wisdom and insight to the study.

Alternative certification teachers. Many individuals obtain teacher licensure through traditional university preparation programs. A growing number of individuals, however, seek teacher training and certification through alternative routes. Hung and Smith (2012) examined the experiences of six teachers who obtained certification through a Master in Teaching (MAT) program. The MAT program provided individuals with bachelor degrees to earn their master of teaching degrees. The researchers determined that teachers who took non-traditional routes to obtain teaching licenses possessed different needs than those who completed traditional university preparation programs (Hung & Smith, 2012).

Through extensive observation and interviews, the researchers determined that MAT teachers include a large population of older second career seekers (Hung & Smith, 2012). Hung and Smith (2012) stated that personal characteristics and life experiences of the study participants directly impacted their teaching philosophies, however, not to the degree that any definitive conclusions could be drawn regarding teaching effectiveness. The findings of the research also suggest that previous life and/or professional experiences potentially contribute to MAT teachers' level of content knowledge (Hung & Smith, 2012). Therefore, it is reasonable to say that MAT teachers may require different mentoring supports during the induction year that addresses content knowledge gained outside of traditional teacher preparation programs (Hung & Smith, 2012).

Virtual mentoring, online mentoring, and e-mentoring. Digital technology in elementary and secondary schools present opportunities for student learning and achievement. Ironically, despite the technological advances available in the United States, many schools and districts still employ site-based teacher mentor programs. Traditional site-based teacher mentor

programs as part of formal induction processes lack digital technology integration, which limits the strategies used in addressing the needs of novice teachers. Some site-based programs provide sufficient release time for mentor and mentees to collaborate, however, classroom and instruction demands prevent regular or consistent collaboration and support. Site-based programs limit mentor-mentee interaction to the point that some novice teachers feel isolated and unsupported. Induction processes fail to offer the kind of support that new and beginning teachers need to feel confident and successful.

Virtual mentoring, also known as online mentoring or e-mentoring, incorporates digital technology to increase collaboration and contact time between mentors and mentees. Bang and Luft (2014) explored the year-long experiences of two first-year secondary science teachers involved in an online mentoring program. Online mentoring provides opportunities for the novice teacher to build content knowledge and opportunities for the mentor teacher to renew pedagogical and content knowledge (Bang & Luft, 2014). Online mentoring potentially saves time and effort due to the ability of the participants to contact one another beyond the school day or when it is convenient (Bang & Luft, 2014).

Summary. The literature reviewed in this study contained similar themes and findings. Most of the studies reviewed here highlighted important benefits of teacher mentor programs to novice teachers in need of support during the induction year. None of the studies highlighted the benefits of including participants from across the teacher career continuum. However, research supports the continued input and evaluation of teachers, administrators, educational leaders, and other major stakeholders as valuable and necessary in the continued efforts to improve teacher mentor programming. It is indeed critical to understand the perceptions of both novice teachers and mentor teachers. Equally critical is the examination of the impact of administrative support

and cooperation on teacher mentor programs and induction processes. Creating and implementing successful teacher mentor programs requires consideration of novice teachers' education, preparation, training, and school placement. Awareness of these elements assists administrators, policymakers, and educational leaders to provide the greatest level of support while utilizing the most effective strategies.

Critique of Previous Research

Previous research provides a wealth of information regarding teacher mentor programs and the effects of these programs on early-career teacher attrition and retention. There is no single correct or definitive way to study these effects that guarantees success. Some researchers choose to conduct qualitative studies. Other researchers select quantitative data collection and analysis methods for quantifiable results. When legitimately used, a mixed-methods approach provides both detailed descriptions and measurable conclusions.

A review of the literature provides clear understanding and useful knowledge about the needs of early-career teachers and the effectiveness of teacher mentor programs. Teacher mentor programs offer varying levels of support to novice teachers who report experiencing benefits from the mentor-mentee relationship. Research shows that new and beginning teachers indeed need support, however, it is often difficult to generalize the findings of qualitative research across a larger context. After conducting a review of new teacher induction and teacher mentor programs in New York, California, and Texas, Bullough (2012) concluded that too many variations exist to make a definitive statement about the overall effectiveness teacher mentor programs. Regarding qualitative studies, findings specific to the perceptions and experiences of the study participants also make it difficult, if not impossible, to generalize findings.

Small sample populations. Small sample size makes it difficult to generalize findings in

qualitative research. Asada (2012) studied the experiences of one novice teacher and one mentor in a single elementary school in Japan over the course of a school year. The participants provided 46 different scenarios that provided the basis for the study's findings (Asada, 2012). The information gained from the study provided valuable insight regarding the early stages of teacher mentoring in Japan, but the small sample population made it impossible to generalize the findings across all Japanese schools (Asada, 2012). In Haigh and Anthony's (2012) case study regarding the efficacy of science instruction in New Zealand, the sample of 20 newly qualified secondary science instructors represented a very small sample population. The participants of the study provided in-depth information that substantiated claims, however, the small sample population made it difficult for researchers to generalize their findings about science instruction throughout all of New Zealand.

Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods approaches. Researchers conducting quantitative or mixed-methods research utilize surveys and questionnaires to collect data. Surveys and questionnaires consist of specific inquiries designed to uncover exact bits of information. The value in collecting data through quantitative or mixed-methods approaches is the ability of the researcher to draw very precise conclusions. In other cases, however, a narrow line questioning limits participants in communicating variations in experiences. Heineke, Mazza, and Tichnor-Wagner (2014) examined teacher attrition and retention rates in a Teach for America program. The researchers employed a mixed-methods approach to data collection. The mixed-methods approach involved the same participants in both the qualitative and quantitative phases of the study. Using the same participants minimized threats to validity and therefore maximized the overall validity of the results (Heineke et al., 2014). Using the same participants also provided for additional consistency in documentation.

Chapter 2 Summary

Determining the potential impact of teacher mentor programs on new teacher attrition requires an in-depth understanding of why such efforts are necessary in the first place. In-depth understanding of the need for teacher mentor programs involves knowledge about teacher shortages, early-career teacher attrition, teacher resiliency, mentor selection processes, administrative support and cooperation, and induction components designed specifically for teachers who obtain licensure through alternative preparation routes. Knowledge of these issues provides for a contextual understanding of how they impact the profession now and in the future.

The existing literatures reveal that perceptions of teacher mentor programs as part of formal induction processes can have positive effects on early-career teacher attrition and retention. The bulk of the research shows that major stakeholders in education agree that teacher mentor programs positively impact new and beginning teachers. Numerous studies accurately present the perceptions and experiences of mentors and mentees regarding the effectiveness of teacher mentor programs. A gap exists in the literature, however. While teacher mentor programs and new teacher induction processes have been previously investigated, research focusing on the perceptions and experiences of teachers from across the career continuum has yet to be explored.

Based on the literature review and the conceptual framework that focuses on early-career teacher attrition as a key factor in teaching shortages in U.S. elementary and secondary schools, the researcher believes there is legitimate reason to examine the topic further. The literature review provides sufficient evidence to promote a research study that seeks to answer the following questions: (a) How do teachers across the career continuum describe the teacher mentor programs in which they participated as part of formal induction? (b) How do teachers

across the career continuum describe their relationships with their assigned mentor teachers? (c)

What characteristics of the teacher mentor program in which they participated do teachers across the career continuum identify as positive or negative influences on their teaching careers?

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction to Chapter 3

This study resulted from a review of the literature that focused on early-career teacher attrition and its impact on teaching shortages in U.S. elementary and secondary schools. Much of the existing literature addresses these shortages as they relate to formal induction processes that utilize teacher mentor programs as a primary strategy in supporting new and beginning teachers. Kardos and Johnson (2010) and Cook (2012) stated that administrators and other educational leaders implement teacher mentor programs in the hopes of ameliorating the high rate of attrition among early-career teachers. Although research demonstrates the effectiveness of teacher mentor programs, attrition rates remain highest among new and beginning teachers (Clandinin et al., 2015).

The conceptual framework for this study focuses on early-career teacher attrition as a primary factor in present and projected teacher shortages in the United States. Associated with the conceptual framework is a theoretical framework that examines the phenomenon through Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory. Sociocultural theory views teaching and learning as socially situated activities (Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, the researcher sought to deepen understanding of the phenomenon through the examination of human interactions in the school setting within the context of teacher mentor programs. The literature review did not uncover previous research studies that revealed generalizable results applicable to teacher mentor programs in every school. Understanding the impact of teacher mentor programs involves developing a solid knowledge base about early-career teacher attrition and the unique needs of new and beginning teachers.

Specifically, the purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the lived

experiences and perceptions of teachers across the career continuum regarding teacher mentor programs. The career continuum consists of three phases. The first phase, or the early-career stage, includes teachers in their first three years of teaching. The second phase, or the second stage, encompasses teachers in their fourth through their tenth year of teaching. The final phase, or the late-stage, is comprised of teachers in their eleventh year of teaching and beyond. Table 1 below summarizes the different phases of the teacher career continuum.

Table 1

Phases of the Teacher Career Continuum

| Phase 1 | Phase 2 | Phase 3 |
|--------------------|--------------|------------|
| Early-career stage | Second-stage | Late-stage |
| 1–3 years | 4–10 years | 11+ years |

The researcher incorporated teachers from across the career continuum in the study to gain deeper insight about the phenomenon. Inclusion of the three phases of the teacher career continuum provided opportunities for intersubjectivity among the participants. The study allowed each participant to move from a place of personal subjectivity with a focus on the individual's own perceptions and lived experiences to a state of intersubjectivity with a focus on shared experiences (Finlay, 2006).

The literature review also revealed that many researchers define teacher career phases similarly. Some researchers refer to teachers in the first phase as beginning or newly qualified teachers (Harfitt, 2014, Harju & Niemi, 2016). Regardless of the label, teachers in the first phase of teaching have completed preservice training and possess less than five years of teaching experience (McGlynn-Stewart, 2015). For the purpose of this study, the researcher identified the

first phase of the teacher career continuum as the early-career stage. Teachers classified as early-career teachers completed preservice training, participated in a teacher mentor program as part of formal induction during their first year of teaching, and possessed 1–3 years of teaching experience.

Similarly, researchers generally agreed on the characteristics of the second and third phases of the career continuum. Al-Ahdal (2014) referred to teachers in the second phase of the career continuum as the mid-career stage. Draves (2013) identified teachers in the second stage as having at least four years of teaching experience, but not more than 10 years. For the purpose of this study, the researcher identified individuals in the second phase of the teacher career continuum as second-stage teachers with 4–10 years of teaching experience. The third phase of the teacher career continuum encompasses veteran teachers. For the purpose of this study, the researcher identified individuals of the third phase of the teacher career continuum as late-stage teachers. Late-stage teachers possess 11 or more years of teaching experience.

The researcher chose to conduct a qualitative study using a transcendental phenomenological approach. As with most qualitative research, transcendental phenomenology seeks to understand the phenomenon through the eyes of an individual or group of individuals who have experienced the same phenomenon. Eddles-Hirsch (2015) stated that a transcendental phenomenological approach to research provides multiple opportunities for researchers to understand a phenomenon through the perceptions and experiences of the participants. Additionally, phenomenology limits the number of participants in the study. Therefore, due to the narrow scope of the study and the small population size, the findings of the study cannot be generalized to larger context. Generalizability is not the goal of phenomenology; qualitative researchers engaged in transcendental phenomenological study look for transferability of the

findings. The findings are transferable when they are applicable to other groups or in other contexts. The inclusion of teachers who represent a broad spectrum of the teaching career provides a richer description of the phenomenon.

The purpose of the chapter, then, is to describe the research design, which includes: (a) the research questions, (b) the study purpose and research design, (c) the research population and sampling method, (d) the instrumentation, (e) the methods of data collection, (f) identification of the variables, (g) data analysis procedures, (h) limitations of the research design, (i) validation, (j) expected findings, (k) potential ethical issues, and (l) an overall summary.

Research Questions

Three research questions guided the study. The researcher designed the questions to give participants multiple opportunities to share their perceptions and descriptions of their lived experiences in direct relation to the phenomenon.

- RQ1: How do teachers across the career continuum describe the teacher mentor programs in which they participated as part of formal induction
- RQ2: How do teachers across the career continuum describe their relationships with their assigned mentor teachers?
- RQ3: What characteristics of the teacher mentor program in which they participated do teachers across the career continuum identify as positive or negative influences on their teaching careers?

Purpose and Design of the Study

Previous research, as detailed in the literature review, demonstrates that high rates of early-career teacher attrition is one of the major contributors to teacher shortages in elementary

and secondary schools in the United States (Clandinin et al., 2015). In response to continued needs to attract and retain qualified teachers, educational leadership at the school, district and state levels implement formal induction processes that utilize teacher mentor programs as a primary support strategy for new and beginning teachers (Martin et al., 2015). Researchers frequently examine the viewpoints of mentors and mentees about their experiences in teacher mentor programs. For example, Pogrud and Cowan (2013) gained valuable insight into their examination of 56 new teachers in a statewide mentor program. Owen and Solomon (2006) examined the perceptions of mentors in the Mentor Teacher Internship Program (MTIP) and discovered the potential importance of pairing mentors and mentees with shared interpersonal similarities. Stanilus (2009) examined the perceptions of both mentees and their assigned mentors who participated in a collaborative mentoring program between one university and a single public school district.

While teacher mentor programs as part of formal induction processes have been previously investigated, phenomenological research on the perceptions of teachers across the career continuum regarding their own lived experiences as mentees has yet to be explored. Therefore, the general problem to be explored in this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the role of teacher mentor programs as part of formal new teacher induction in elementary and secondary schools in the United States. The specific problem to be explored is to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of teachers across the career continuum regarding the effectiveness of teacher mentor programs in elementary and secondary schools across the state of Kansas. Understanding how teachers view teacher mentor programs and related practices, especially as a means to retain early-career teachers, represents the first step toward identifying the most effective support strategies.

The researcher chose a transcendental phenomenological approach for this study. With transcendental phenomenology, the focus is on participants' descriptions of the phenomenon. Creswell (2013) stated that the goal is to understand, not interpret. The researcher decided to pursue transcendental phenomenology after reviewing the features of an initial consideration, the case study approach. Yin's (2014) extensive description of the case study approach assisted the researcher in ruling it out as an appropriate option for this study. Case studies generally seek to answer "how" and "why" questions. In this study, however, the researcher's goal was to determine not only "how," but "what" the participants experienced in relation to the phenomenon. Additionally, case studies are empirical in nature and seek to examine phenomena in a real-world context (Yin, 2014). The analysis of the perceptions of individual participants with a particular phenomenon may not necessarily mirror a real-world context, which is not relevant to the study. The study focused on understanding teacher perceptions in direct relation to teacher mentor programs.

The case study approach did not align with this study in the same way and to the same degree as phenomenology. Phenomenological design provides for the in-depth study of a group of persons who experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). In this particular case, the researcher examined the perceptions of teachers who participated in teacher mentor programs in their first, or induction, year of teaching. The goal was to collect data from individuals who experienced the same phenomenon in order to construct an overall description that reflects the experiences in full (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) explained that descriptions should consist of both "what" the participants experienced and "how" they experienced it. DeFelice and Janesick (2015) stated that phenomenologists seek to understand the universal essence of the participants' lived experiences with the phenomenon through a reiterative examination process.

The reiterative process involves attempting to understand the phenomenon being studied through the examination of illustrations and examples taken directly from participant experiences (Dortch, 2016).

The concept of universal essence is essential to Husserl's transcendental phenomenology and is defined as the structure of essential meanings that explains a particular phenomenon (Dahlberg, 2009). In other words, essence reveals the absolutely vital characteristics of a phenomenon and without it the phenomenon would not exist as that particular phenomenon (Dahlberg, 2009). Natanson (as cited in Dahlberg, 2009) explained that Husserl's essence is not some mysterious thing that exists within an object, but it is something firmly rooted in its intentional character. Therefore, Husserl's universal essence is not something that is uncovered in research, nor is it something that is part of or is seen in the everyday world (Dahlberg, 2009).

Thomson (2008) highlighted the various positions from which to engage phenomenology. That is, phenomenology is a type of philosophy, research methodology, or in some cases, both (Thomson, 2008). Within these categories, phenomenology exists on a continuum, ranging from completely philosophical to wholly interpretive (Thomson, 2008). The interpretive response to phenomenology is referred to as a hermeneutic approach, one that falls under Manan's (as cited in Thomson, 2008), "phenomenology of practice." This study, however, took on a transcendental response to phenomenology that emphasized not the interpretation of meaning, but on detailed descriptions of the phenomenon through participants' lived experiences (Thomson, 2008). The overall goal in this case was to deepen understanding through the examination of the detailed descriptions the participants provide through their individual lived experiences and the outcome of their shared experiences of the focus group discussion.

Phenomenology focuses on the subjective, lived experiences of the participants in

relation to the phenomenon being studied. Researchers engaged in qualitative studies based on phenomenology collect data that provide participants with repeated opportunities to share and examine their own perspectives anchored in lived experiences (DeFelice & Janesick, 2015). There is, however, another consideration when conducting phenomenological research—intersubjectivity. Shabani (2016) defined intersubjectivity in phenomenological research as the shared social setting of participants in a study that assists them in jointly understanding and dealing with a task. Intersubjectivity is woven in specific data collection tools such as the focus group. A focus group is a situation in which participants are brought together and given a platform not only to share their lived experiences in relation to the phenomenon being studied, but to listen to the perceptions, descriptions, and opinions of others (Creswell, 2013). In this, there is a movement that occurs that takes the participant from a place of “my subjectivity” to one that is a shared, transpersonal blending of lived experiences (Finlay, 2006). Finlay (2006) explained that the intersubjectivity of phenomenology accepts that sometimes we see ourselves in others and sometimes we see others in ourselves. Meaning-making, therefore, does not come solely from a place of solitude, but also from a place that reflects the public social world, which is part of our existence and where humankind is intersubjectively engaged (Finlay, 2006).

The results of this transcendental phenomenological study are potentially useful in the exploration of teacher mentor programs and their impact on new and beginning elementary and secondary teachers in U.S. education. The intersubjective nature of the research method approach revealed insights from teachers from across the career continuum that could assist school administrators in accomplishing certain invaluable tasks. Administrators could take the insight gained from this study to create and implement formal induction programs that more closely address the unique needs presented in their districts. Early-career teachers in urban

school settings may not have the same encounters and challenges that teachers in rural school districts face. Additionally, findings demonstrated in the study could potentially impact the manner in which administrators match mentor teachers with novice teachers.

One phenomenological study is not enough to serve as the catalyst that triggers necessary changes and improvements to entire systems and processes involved in training and supporting early-career teachers. The findings of this study could, however, open the door to further discussion and deeper investigation of teacher mentor programs and the needs of early-career teachers. Perceptions and description of the lived experiences of teachers across the career continuum uncovered through extensive data collection and analysis provide administrators and other major stakeholders in education valuable insight into a complex issue. This study makes relevant contributions to the educational community regarding new teacher mentor programs and the potential roles these programs play in the development of teachers' careers. Impacting the way novice teachers transition from a place of theory to one of practice, from university learning to real classroom pedagogical action, may help to decrease the rate at which early-career teachers leave the profession altogether. Accomplishing this task, however, begins not with huge action, but with small, methodical and purposeful steps that open further access to information that describes with deep and rich detail what novice teachers require to remain and thrive in their chosen fields.

Using a transcendental phenomenological approach provided a very textural description of teacher mentor programs. Findings of this study promote genuine inquiry among educational leaders who serve as the change agents of their schools and districts. Armed with a deeper understanding of teacher mentor programs through the viewpoints of teachers across the career continuum can potentially result in an administrator's or other major stakeholder's capacity to

listen and analyze climates and situations regarding new teacher support before making concrete decisions about processes in which they are not fully informed.

Research Population and Sampling Method

One of the most important tasks in conducting qualitative research is obtaining an adequate sample. Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, and Fontenot (2013) stated that an adequate sample is fundamental to producing credible research. The difficulty in obtaining an adequate sample in qualitative research is directly linked to data saturation (Marshall et al., 2013). Data saturation occurs when adding participants to a study fails to result in new perspectives or information. Ritchie, Lewis, and Elam (as cited in Mason, 2010) described this as an occurrence of diminishing returns.

Achieving data saturation, however, is not a simple task. Leading qualitative methodologies provide very few guidelines to assist researchers in establishing sufficient sample size (Marshall et al., 2013). Mason (2010) stated that qualitative research calls for smaller sample sizes than quantitative studies. Therefore, it is important that the sample size is large enough to provide the researcher with enough data from sources that contribute in meaningful ways to the study, but not so large that data becomes repetitive and unnecessary (Mason, 2010). Few concrete guidelines exist for data saturation in qualitative research. Morse (as cited in Marshall et al., 2013) described a lack of published guidelines or tests to assist researchers in estimating adequate sample size. Various recommendations exist regarding sample size and how to achieve data saturation. Polkinghorne (as cited in Creswell, 2013) suggested that qualitative studies require a sample size of 5–25 participants.

Originally, 15 individuals expressed interest in this study, however, only 13 qualified to participate. Thus, the sample population consisted of 13 teachers from across the state of

Kansas. For this study, the researcher chose 12 as the minimum number of participants needed and 15 as the optimal number of participants needed. A sample size of 12–15 provided enough data to lend credibility to the research. All participants were current or former teachers in the state of Kansas who participated in a teacher mentor program as part of a formal induction process during their first year of teaching.

The researcher employed two non-probability sampling methods. First, convenience sampling allowed for the recruitment of participants who lived or worked in close proximity to the researcher (Creswell, 2013). The researcher also posted recruitment flyers on community bulletin boards at local businesses, the public library, and a variety of coffee shops (see Appendix A). The researcher also posted digital copies of the recruitment flyer using two social media platforms, Facebook and Instagram. Second, snowball sampling used existing study participants to recruit future study participants (Creswell, 2013). Snowball sampling involves identifying people who know people who have first-hand knowledge and experience of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2013). The researcher contacted teachers in the area and asked for suggestions of other teachers who might qualify for the study. Using convenience sampling, the researcher utilized Facebook and Instagram to find potential participants.

The point of phenomenology is to gather first-hand and subjective information (Akdağ & Senol, 2018). With this in mind, the researcher also employed purposeful sampling. Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, and McKibbin (2015) identified purposeful sampling as the most commonly described method in published qualitative research. In this study, the researcher utilized purposeful sampling to recruit participants who met specific criteria. Individuals who took part in the study were teachers who had all participated in teacher mentor programs as part of formal induction during their first year of teaching. Those who qualified for the study also held initial

or professional teacher licensure at the time of their induction.

Once the researcher made initial contact with a potential study participant, she used email communication to deliver the Potential Study Participant Questionnaire (Q1) (see Appendix B) and Basic Consent Form (see Appendix C) for participants to complete and return within a given deadline. Q1 was designed to move the selection process forward. Selection of participants was contingent upon the return of the completed questionnaire, which determined whether or not interested individuals met the sampling criteria. The researcher's goal was to recruit an equal amount of male and female participants from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds. A more critical aspect of the study, however, was the recruitment of participants from across the career continuum. That is, the researcher focused on the recruitment of participants from the early-career stage, second-stage, and late-stage of the teaching profession. Furthermore, the study did not exclude retired teachers or teachers who had permanently exited the profession. Teachers who no longer worked in the field qualified for the study as long as they met all other requirements.

The first set of criteria focused on individuals employed in the profession (referred to as in-service teachers) in an accredited public, charter, private, or other type of school located in the state of Kansas. The study required in-service teachers to meet the following criteria:

- must hold a valid Kansas teaching license,
- must currently be teaching in an accredited school located in the state of Kansas, and
- must have completed one full academic year of a teacher mentor program in the first year of teaching as part of formal induction.

The study required retired teachers or teachers who had permanently exited the field to meet the following criteria:

- must have held a valid Kansas teaching license while still employed as a teacher,
- must have been employed in their last teaching position as an elementary or secondary-level teacher in an accredited school located in the state of Kansas, and
- must have completed one full academic year of a teacher mentoring program in their first year of teaching as part of formal induction.

The state of Kansas offers several different types of teaching licenses, as determined by the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE). For this reason, it is important to clarify what type of licenses participants in the study held. All participants held, at the time of this study or at the time of their last teaching placement, at least one of the following three Kansas teaching licenses:

- Initial Teaching License,
- Provisional Teaching License, or
- Professional Teaching License.

First, the Initial Teaching License is an entry-level license granted to new and beginning teachers who previously completed a state-approved teacher education and preparation program. This is a two-year nonrenewable license (Kansas State Department of Education, 2019). Teachers who previously completed a state-approved teacher education and preparation program in another state are eligible for the Initial Teaching License. Second, the Provisional Teaching License is granted to Kansas teachers who already hold the Initial Teaching License or the Professional Teaching License. Teachers who apply for the Provisional Teaching license generally seek endorsement in a different subject area. It is a one-year renewable license. Third, the Professional Teaching License is a professional-level license granted to teachers in Kansas after they complete the teaching performance assessment as dictated by the state board of

education. Completion of the teaching performance assessment must be verified by the administrator where the applicant completed the assessment. This is a five-year non-renewable license.

Once participants completed and returned Q1, the researcher reviewed their responses and determined their eligibility for the study. Qualified individuals received a follow-up email containing the Basic Consent Form (see Appendix C) and the Participant Questionnaire Regarding Personal Experiences with Teacher Mentor Programs (Q2) (see Appendix D). Specifically, the Basic Consent Form described the purpose of the study, the role and responsibilities of the participants, the risks and benefits of participation, a confidentiality statement, and the participant's right to withdraw from the study. Q2 contained open-ended questions that provided participants with multiple opportunities to offer detailed explanations and descriptions of their experiences with the phenomenon. The researcher used Q2 as a second filtering tool to identify individuals who did not meet the sampling criteria. Following a review of the responses on Q2, the researcher made a final determination regarding eligibility and scheduled one-on-one interviews with all those who qualified for the study. The researcher invited participants to express concerns and ask questions at this time.

Instrumentation

The study employed three questionnaires, one-on-one interviews, and a focus group to collect data. First, as previously discussed, the researcher designed Q1 to help with filtering out individuals who did not qualify for the study. Q1 asked basic questions regarding licensure and first-year teaching assignments. Those who did not qualify for the study received a follow-up telephone call thanking them for their interest.

Second, Q2 posed open-ended questions about participants' perceptions and lived experiences regarding teacher mentor programs. This questionnaire provided the participants with multiple opportunities to offer detailed explanations of their perceptions and lived experiences related to the phenomenon. Detailed explanations and responses assisted the researcher in developing a broader understanding of the participant's unique lived experiences with the phenomenon. This is especially helpful in studies in which the goal is to give participants the opportunity to describe their experiences with the phenomenon as opposed to measuring the level of their experiences (Kirkpatrick & Johnson, 2014). That is, it is crucial in transcendental phenomenological research to design and implement data collection tools that give participants repeated access to the phenomenon and multiple opportunities to reflect on their own lived experiences related to the phenomenon. It is not a goal of the research in this type of study to determine a quantitative measurement of the participants' lived experiences.

Third, the Participant Biographical Questionnaire (Q3) (see Appendix H), implemented at the beginning of the interview process, provided contextual information for the researcher. Q3 provided specific pieces of information that helped the researcher to develop a clearer picture of the participants' background, family, and factors that influenced their professional decisions. Q3 also gave individuals the opportunity to describe their current job placements and the nature of the students that they serve.

In this transcendental phenomenological study, open-ended questions provided participants with opportunities to describe in detail their experiences with the phenomenon. While open-ended questionnaires are a common collection tool among many qualitative researchers, the literature review revealed that both qualitative and quantitative researchers use open-ended questions. Qualitative researchers employing phenomenological approaches find

questionnaires that contain open-ended questions especially beneficial when attempting to understand multiple perspectives (Russell & Russell, 2011).

Researchers employing a mixed methods approach to data collection design questionnaires to measure levels of participant responses, however, these same questionnaires also ask questions that give participants opportunities to explain their responses in a more in-depth manner (Cook, 2012). Extended written response questionnaires consist of one part containing questions that elicit responses that are measured on a Likert scale and another part with questions requiring detailed, specific written responses (Hudson, 2012). In this study, an open-ended questionnaire (Q2) provided the researcher with valuable opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of participants' perceptions regarding teacher mentor programs and the importance of the mentor-mentee relationship.

Data Collection

Triangulation of data from three different data collection sources was achieved. Beyond responses given on Q1, the first form of data collection was derived from participant responses to open-ended questions on Q2. The second form of data collection was derived from recorded transcripts of the semi-structured interviews of each of the participants. The interviews took approximately one hour to complete. The researcher conducted the interviews using an interview protocol to guide the discussion (see Appendix E). The interview protocol also included a Participant Biographical Survey (see Appendix H), which highlighted information aimed at filtering out individuals who did not qualify for the study. The third form of data collection used was a focus group. The researcher conducted the focus group discussion using a pre-established protocol (see Appendix F). The focus group convened followed within a week of the final one-on-one interview and took approximately 1.5 hours to complete. The researcher

based the interview and focus group protocols used in this study on Bivens' (2016) Interview Protocol Form after obtaining permission from the author (see Appendix G).

In-person interviews and the focus group took place in convenient settings that provided security and safety. Locations were clean, professional, and provided at no cost to the researcher or participants. Each location also offered ample and convenient parking. On participant request and with prior administrative approval, the researchers conducted one interview in a classroom during non-school hours. Although the researcher preferred face-to-face interviews, the inability to meet in-person did not disqualify individuals from participation. Upon request of the participants, the researcher conducted telephone interviews using the same protocol used with in-person interviews.

Identification of Attributes

Attributes are characteristics that define a research study. Teacher shortages is a primary attribute that defined this study. Teacher shortage is understood as a shortfall in teaching staff due to the inability of schools and districts to hire teachers who are highly qualified to teach in a particular grade or content area (Clandinin et al., 2015). The meaning extends beyond the ability to simply fill positions. Many districts, due to concerns regarding an excess of unfilled positions, elect to hire unqualified teachers.

Early-career teacher attrition is also a primary attribute that defined this study. For the purpose of this study, teachers categorized in the early-career stage are new and beginning educators who have 1–3 years of teaching experience. Previous research shows that these novice teachers leave the field at a higher rate than their more experienced counterparts. Understanding the needs of early-career teachers provides additional insight into the challenges school systems face in retaining high quality new and beginning teachers.

The teacher career continuum is a third attribute that defined this study. The teacher career continuum consists of three main phases. Phase 1 encompasses the early-career stage. Teachers in Phase 1 of the teacher career continuum have 1–3 years of teaching experience. Phase 2 of the teacher career continuum includes the second-stage of teaching. Teachers in Phase 2 have 4–10 years of teaching experience. Finally, Phase 3 of the teacher career continuum includes the late-stage of teaching. Teachers in Phase 3 have 11 or more years of teaching experience.

Teacher mentor programs in relation to formal new teacher induction is a fourth primary attribute that defined this study. Teacher mentor programs and new teacher formal induction processes are related, but not synonymous. For the purpose of this study, formal new teacher induction processes use teacher mentor programs as a primary strategy to address the needs of early-career teachers. One is not a replacement of the other. Instead, teacher mentor programs stem from induction processes aimed at supporting new and beginning teachers during the first year of teaching.

Data Analysis Procedures

Qualitative research, by nature, is not focused on finding or assigning a numerical value to a phenomenon. The researcher collects a large amount of data and faces the tasking of making sense of the information as it relates to the phenomenon being studied. The data often uncovers an overwhelming amount of information. It is the job of the researcher or primary investigator to read through this data to determine what is and what is not important or relevant to the study.

Transcendental phenomenology, the school of phenomenology that serves as the foundation on which all other phenomenological approaches are based, relies on a data analysis approach that consists of clearly defined methods and procedures. Moustakas (1994) explained

that transcendental phenomenology is comprised of three core processes that assist the researcher in deriving knowledge. Briefly stated, the three core processes are epoche, transcendental-phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation. Epoche is the first step in the process and requires that the researcher begin with a clean slate in relation to how he or she views the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Epoche, or bracketing, is the process by which the researcher sets aside his or her own prejudices, biases, and presuppositions in order to gain an unencumbered viewpoint of the phenomenon being studied (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015; Moustakas, 1994). Next, transcendental-phenomenological reduction involves seeing the phenomenon being studied in a completely new way and ultimately developing a textural description of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Finally, the process of imaginative variation aids the researcher in developing a structural description of the essences of an experience (Moustakas, 1994). During this stage of the analysis process, the researcher views the phenomenon from different perspectives in order to develop a true understanding of the lived experiences of the participants (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015).

Horizonalization. The transcendental phenomenological approach to data analysis is grounded in Moustakas' horizonalization and bracketing (Creswell, 2013). In horizonalization, the researcher takes collected data, which consists of participant responses and feedback, and highlights significant statements, thoughts, quotes, and other elements the participant shares. These highlighted pieces are then used to form clusters of meaning (Creswell, 2013). This is a systematic data analysis process that builds from the analysis of narrow to much broader units of measure (Creswell, 2013). In this study, the researcher followed this same data analysis pattern in the examination of transcripts of interviews and focus group discussions.

Eddles-Hirsch (2015) described horizonalization as the first step in the phenomenological

reduction process. During the process of horizontalization, the researcher closely examines each participant's statements as potentially useful to the study. That is, the researcher is open to each participant's comments, granting individual comments the same value (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015). Moustakas (as cited in Eddles-Hirsch, 2015) related horizontalization to the epoche process in that the researcher must keep an open mind in examining participants' comments and statements about the phenomenon. In this study, horizontalization is reflected in the listing and grouping of statements about the value of the connection between the mentor teacher and mentee as it relates to new teacher retention. Data analysis in the study included a cross-analysis of transcribed interviews and questionnaire responses.

Transcribing Process. A key procedural element of data analysis in qualitative studies is transcription of various forms of data, including audio and video recordings of interviews, focus group discussions, and other interactions between fellow participants and the researcher. Bailey (2008) explained that the point of transcribing audio and/or video recordings into written form is to aid researchers during the data analysis process. In qualitative studies, the act of transcribing is not just a data collection tool, but it is an analysis tool, as well, because it allows researchers to examine the transcribed data for themes, connections, and relevant information that link participants to the phenomenon or to other fellow participants (Bailey, 2008). For the purpose of this study, the researcher personally transcribed all interviews and the focus group discussion within a week of the original interview or focus group date. Audio recordings enabled the researcher to revisit parts of the interview or focus group discussion for the purpose of correction and clarification. If further clarification is needed, the researcher can contact the participants directly.

Coding. Saldaña (2009) described coding as a tool used with language-based or visual

data. Specifically, researchers use coding to identify categories and themes in the data related directly to the phenomenon and is intended to assist the researcher in symbolically assigning attributes to the data collected (Saldaña, 2009). This researcher employed two First Cycle coding methods. The first is attribute coding. Attribute coding is appropriate for nearly all qualitative studies and is best used in studies that involve more than one participant in more than one site. It is also appropriate for studies that involve a wide variety of data forms (Saldaña, 2009). Saldaña (2009) explained that attribute coding assists in the categorization of metadata, or data that provides additional information about other data. A strength of attribute coding is it assists the researcher in managing the qualitative data as well as enables the researcher to easily locate various pieces of essential data (Saldaña, 2009). An example of attribute coding used in this study is the coding of participant's biographical information, job assignment, and placement on the teacher career continuum.

A second First Cycle coding method used in this study was InVivo coding. Saldaña (2009) described InVivo coding as a word or short phrase taken directly from the participants' words. InVivo coding is also known as literal coding or verbatim coding. InVivo coding is appropriate for nearly every type of qualitative study. Saldaña (2009) advocated its use for beginning qualitative researchers who do not have a great deal of experience with coding. Also, InVivo coding honors the voice of the participant, which is invaluable characteristic of this study. For example, in this study, participants described district-mandated teacher mentor programs that consisted of mandatory meetings, required assignments, and observation and feedback. Multiple participants identified required assignments as a district-mandate element. Each of these participants referred to the required assignments and tasks as "busy work." The participants repeated the term throughout interviews and the focus group discussion.

A Second Cycle of coding used in the study was pattern coding. Pattern coding develops what Saldaña (2009) referred to as a meta-code. Meta-code organizes previously similarly coded data into categories (Saldaña, 2009). It is possible to use pattern coding a stand-alone coding method. Pattern coding assisted the researcher in identify common participant perspectives, which is valuable in determining the intersubjectivity of the study. The researcher employed pattern coding to the focus group discussion and discovered a pattern of behavior that resulted in teacher confidence. Each of the participants of the focus group shared that they tended to ask more questions and feel more confident when they perceived their mentors as approachable.

Reading and memoing. Those with knowledge about qualitative studies understand the overwhelming nature of data collection and analysis. Creswell (2013) stated that it is impossible to give adequate warning about the seemingly unqualified amount of information collected. The sheer volume of information gathered through interviews and questionnaires alone calls for the reading and re-reading of transcripts. For this study, the researcher chose to organize data by first reading and re-reading transcribed material. Agur (as cited in Creswell, 2013) explained that reading transcripts in their entirety multiple times gives the researcher context. That is, the researcher is able to become immersed in the details and gain an understanding of the material in entirety before breaking things up into pieces or sections (Creswell, 2013).

Another recommendation for data collection utilized in this study is the addition of memos to transcribed materials. Creswell (2013) described memoing as the process of adding short phrases or ideas that occur to the researcher as he or she reads over the transcribed material. In this study, the researcher read through the transcribed interviews and focus group discussion several times to identify potential themes and repeated key ideas (Creswell, 2013). Memoing helped the researcher to organize the data into a format that provided a foundation for the coding

process. At the very least, the memos assisted the researcher in identifying and categorizing major ideas (Creswell, 2013).

Describing, classifying, and themes. The next step in the process involves developing codes or categories (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) described this as the heart of qualitative data analysis and further explained that the terms codes and categories could be used interchangeably. During the process of developing codes and categories, the researcher works to build detailed descriptions of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). In building descriptions, the author describes what he or she sees (Creswell, 2013). In this study, the researcher developed both a textural (what) and structural (how) description of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Classification involves taking the coded information and identifying larger or broader units of meaning, or themes (Creswell, 2013). In this study, the researcher reviewed each of the codes and placed them according to thematic categories. For the purposes of this study, the researcher did not use all codes. In total, this researcher identified three major themes and eight related subthemes.

Constant comparative analysis. The constant comparative method of qualitative data analysis involves the assignment of thematic labels to particular words, phrases, or passages (Beaudoin, 2014). The constant comparative method calls for the review and re-review of all documents to ensure the validity of themes and other common categories as they are identified. In this study, the constant comparative method was especially instrumental in assisting the researcher to develop a structural description of the phenomenon itself. Specifically, the process enabled the researcher to identify themes directly related to the structure of teacher mentor programs as experienced by the participants themselves. In this study the researcher was able to highlight common structural elements of the different programs described in questionnaires,

interviews, and the focus group discussion. Each of the transcribed documents were read, reviewed, and coded throughout the entire comparison process. If the process revealed new codes, old documents were revisited. Such a method provided for a thorough analysis of all documents.

Limitations of the Research Design

There are several limitations related to research design. First, while Moustakas' (as cited in Creswell, 2013) approach is very structured, which can provide the level of guidance new or inexperienced researchers need, it can also prove to be too structured (Creswell, 2013). In this particular study, the researcher found that this structure sometimes confined her to a particular way of thinking and created a sense of dependence on the approach itself.

A second limitation in the research design was the challenge the researcher faced in finding an equal amount of participants to fill each of the career continuum phases. For example, it was far easier to locate early-career and second-stage teachers who all participated in teacher mentor programs as part of formal induction than it was to locate late-stage teachers who participated in similar programs. Individuals who possessed decades of experience often did not know that induction processes incorporated teacher mentoring as a strategy to support new and beginning teachers. The researcher also found that the further removed late-stage teachers were from the early-career stage of teaching, the more difficult it was for them to recount their lived experiences.

A third limitation of the design were the actual induction programs or the value of the induction programs of the schools. In this study, most of the teachers taught in public school systems. Some, however, taught in private schools. Private schools and public schools often have contrasting opinions about the value of teacher mentor programs and induction processes.

Differences in funding and other finance-related issues may have affected the way a participant responded to inquiries or perceived his or her past experiences.

A fourth limitation relates to sampling methods and the sample population. Due to the decision to employ convenience sampling, snowball sampling, and purposeful sampling, the researcher experienced difficulty recruiting two types of individuals. First, the researcher struggled to recruit male participants. Only two males participated in this study. Second, the researcher struggled to recruit participants in the late-stage of the teacher career continuum. The study was limited to the state of Kansas. Therefore, the researcher examined teacher mentor programs in one state instead of multiple states which may have presented more opportunities to identify participants with 11 or more years of teaching experience.

Validation

Bracketing assisted the researcher in building the study's credibility. Moustakas (as cited in Creswell, 2013) explained that the researcher must be careful to remove personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences with the phenomenon in order to fully give voice to the participants themselves. This does not mean that the researcher cannot address his or her own perceptions, but that it is important to address them for the purpose of setting them aside so that the perceptions of the participants in the study can be the focus.

The researcher employed peer review in an effort to build an ethically sound study. Lincoln and Guba (as cited in Creswell, 2013) describe the peer de-briefer as a type of "devil's advocate" who serves to keep the researcher honest. This individual's role is multi-faceted in that he or she can ask difficult questions about the research as well as serve as a sympathetic sounding board for the researcher as he or she works through issues related to data analysis and interpretations (Creswell, 2013). The peer review or de-briefing strategy is just as useful to

building an ethically sound study as member checking. Peer review or de-briefing involves obtaining participants' feedback regarding the credibility of the researcher's findings and interpretations of the data collected (Creswell, 2013). In this study, both the peer review and de-briefing strategy as well as member checking in the process of research validation.

Researcher as instrument. It is important to recognize that, while the researcher in a phenomenological study is expected to release his or her own biases and preconceived ideas about the phenomenon, there is an intersubjectivity that exists between the researcher and the participants. Finlay (2006) described the research encounter between researcher and participant as having dance-like qualities. During the research process, they share an intersubjective space that involves experience and reflection and re-reflection after the shared researched process is over (Finlay, 2006). Finlay (2006) described an empathy and reflection between the researcher and participants that assist them both to develop a layered understanding of the phenomenon. The researcher understood the importance of not being swayed by personal experiences and perceptions, while being part of the overall research process. Sharing the intersubjective research space required that both the researcher and participants consider different perspectives and experiences, which ultimately helped them to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

Dependability/Reliability. Success of this phenomenological study was largely contingent upon the researcher's ability to provide detailed descriptions of the perceptions and experiences of the participants. Thus, the researcher followed Moustakas' line of questioning that involved identifying the participants' experiences with the phenomenon and identifying the contexts or situations that influenced or affected these experiences (Creswell, 2013). The researcher generated data from two sources. First, Moustakas' process provided the researcher

with appropriate guidance and opportunity to present participants' detailed descriptions of the phenomenon being studied. Second, as a form of member checking, the researcher provided all participants digital copies of the interview and focus group transcripts so that they could provide feedback regarding accuracy. Essentially, following the transcribing process, the researcher emailed transcripts of individual interviews and the focus group discussion to participants for comments, corrections, clarifications, and other feedback. Third, to enhance trustworthiness and credibility of the study, the researcher recruited the assistance of a teacher not related to the study to read and review all questionnaires and protocols. This helped to ensure that the questions and the processes were understandable to yield dependable results.

Expected Findings

Because this is a transcendental phenomenological study that examined the perceptions of a group of teachers who all experienced teacher mentor programs as mentees, the researcher expected the findings to reflect a variety of viewpoints that could transfer to other populations and contexts in education. This is due to the individualistic nature of the research design and the data collected. While the researcher fully expected to discover patterns in thoughts, opinions, feelings, and even experiences, what proved true for one participant did not always prove true for another participant in the study. The researcher was not able to pre-determine the characteristics of the participants in the study. For example, the study revealed life circumstances, isolated responsibilities, and other situations that affected participant attitudes, viewpoints, and responses to situations. However, the outcome of the study did uncover potentially effective mentoring practices that impact early-career teacher attrition.

Ethical Issues

Conflict of interest. There was not a conflict of interest in this study. This researcher is

a 20-year veteran teacher who teaches at the secondary level in a public high school, but has experience teaching in both public and private school systems. The researcher also has extensive experience teaching both elementary and secondary school. Additionally, she has participated in a teacher mentor program as part of formal induction. Her experience is limited to being mentored, however. That is, the researcher has never served in the capacity of a mentor teacher assigned to a new or beginning teacher as part of formal induction. At the time of this study, no overlapping between the researcher and the participants existed. That is, at the time of the study, the researcher was not employed by any school or district in the study. Also, the researcher had never participated in an induction program at any school or district in the study.

Researcher's position. Novice teachers face many challenges in the first year of teaching. Generally, induction processes provide opportunity for new and beginning teachers to learn about their chosen profession. Specifically, teacher mentor programs provide deeper contact points that promote collaboration among peers and the importance of investing in one's school community. Understanding the nature and scope of the needs of early-career teachers presents administrators, policymakers, and other education leaders with information that could potentially assist them in developing outreach and programs that more closely align with the challenges faced in the first few years of teaching.

Ethical issues in the study. Researcher bias is a main ethical issue of the study. The transcendental phenomenological approach calls for the researcher to take a fresh look at the phenomenon being examined. In order to do so, he or she must set aside personal experiences with the phenomenon. Therefore, in this study, the researcher worked to set aside her own personal biases and opinions related to the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Bracketing assisted the researcher in reducing as much bias as possible, although it did not completely eliminate the

issue. The researcher did her best to give voice to the study participants' perceptions and lived experiences of the phenomenon.

Chapter 3 Summary

This chapter provides an overview of the study including major elements which include the research questions, purpose and design of the study, population and sampling method, instrumentation, data collection, identification of attributes, data analysis procedures, limitations of the research design, validation, expected findings, and ethical issues. Specifically speaking, the researcher described the unique features of phenomenology and in doing so she explained the importance of providing detailed descriptions of participants' lived experiences and perceptions directly related to teacher mentor programs. The purpose of the study was to examine the perceptions of teachers across the career continuum regarding teacher mentor programs. The results, therefore, may potentially provide educational leadership with information that assists in the improvement of such programs. Notably, the decision to include the lived experiences and perceptions of teachers from three distinct phases of teacher career continuum highlighted the uniqueness and necessity of the study. In reviewing the literature, the researcher found no other research that brings together viewpoints of teachers from across the career continuum in one study. Presenting these potentially diverse lived experiences and perceptions provided the researcher with opportunity to layer and, therefore, significantly deepen understanding about teacher mentor programs. Further, the study's findings may potentially be useful in the creation and implementation of new teacher induction programs that more closely address the needs of novice teachers, which may ultimately contribute to early-career teacher retention in U.S. elementary and secondary schools.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

Introduction

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of teachers across the career continuum regarding teacher mentor programs. Specifically, the study focused on teachers' experiences as mentees during their first year of teaching. The individuals who took part in the study were current or former teachers who were assigned mentors as part of a formal induction process. Each of the participants fell into one of three categories: early-stage (years 1–3), second stage (years 4–10), and late-stage (years 11 and over). Individuals who had left the teaching profession or who had retired from teaching were not excluded from the study. The researcher categorized these teachers according to the number of years of experience they had at the time of their final exit from the field. The inclusion of teachers who had achieved different levels of professional experience provided for a broader spectrum from which to gain deeper understanding of the phenomenon. The belief is that participants with more time in the field have a greater number of years of experience on which to reflect, while early-career and second-stage teachers might help to deepen understanding about the ever-changing needs of teachers. The end result is a more layered description of the phenomenon itself.

The following three research questions guided the study:

- RQ1: How do teachers across the career continuum describe the teacher mentor programs in which they participated as part of formal induction?
- RQ2: How do teachers across the career continuum describe their relationships with their assigned mentor teachers?
- RQ3: What characteristics of the teacher mentor program in which they participated

do teachers across the career continuum identify as positive or negative influences on their teaching careers?

Chapter 4 provides a discussion of the collected data and analysis process, including a description of the sample, research methodology and analysis, presentation of data and results, and summary.

Description of the Sample

The study took place in the state of Kansas and drew upon the experiences of elementary and secondary teachers from six public school districts and one private school organization. All participants were employed by schools and districts in the study that were accredited through the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE). The one private school organization involved in the study was additionally accredited through a regional accrediting body called the Higher Learning Commission (HLC).

Applying purposeful and snowball sampling methods, the researcher made contact with 15 different individuals (Creswell, 2013). Of these 15, only 13 qualified for the study. There were two males and 11 females who received the following pseudonyms: Chris, Eleanor, Kathleen, Rose, Janet, Gina, Kendra, Patricia, Nancy, Wendy, Theresa, Steve, and Rebecca. The participants were all teachers or former teachers in the state of Kansas who had taken part in formal induction processes that included a teacher mentor program component. Each participant was assigned a mentor who took part in supervision and training during the first year of teaching. All participants possessed provisional teacher licensure in the state of Kansas at the time of their induction. Further, all participants possessed current professional licenses to teach in the state of Kansas at the time of the study. Eleven teachers were still active in the field. Of the 11, there were three secondary teachers, seven elementary teachers, and one individual who had an

elementary background, but had since become an elementary school principal. The following three tables summarize participant information. Table 2 shows the participant's gender and current teaching status. Active indicates that, at the time of the study, the participant held a current teaching license and still taught under contract in a public or private elementary or secondary school in the United States. Inactive indicates that, at the time of the study, the participant had exited the profession.

Table 2

Summary of Participant Gender and Current Teaching Status

| Participant | Gender | Current Teaching Status |
|-------------|--------|-------------------------|
| Chris | Male | Active |
| Eleanor | Female | Active |
| Kathleen | Female | Active |
| Rose | Female | Active |
| Janet | Female | Active |
| Gina | Female | Active |
| Kendra | Female | Active |
| Patricia | Female | Active |
| Nancy | Female | Active |
| Wendy | Female | Active |
| Theresa | Female | Active |
| Steve | Male | Inactive |
| Rebecca | Female | Active |

Table 3 below shows the specific teaching assignments for each of the participants. The first column indicates the participant's name. The middle column indicates the assignment each participant held during the induction year. The third column indicates the assignment each participant currently holds, or held at the time of this study. A blank space in the third column indicates that the participant had exited the profession permanently at the time of the study. For elementary teachers, the specific grade levels are listed. For secondary teachers, the specific subjects or content areas are listed.

Table 3

Summary of Participant Induction and Current Teaching Assignments

| Participant | Induction Assignment | Current Assignment |
|-------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Chris | 5th Grade | 5th Grade |
| Eleanor | H.S. Math | H.S. Math |
| Kathleen | Band | Band |
| Rose | M.S. FACS | M.S. FACS |
| Janet | Pre-Kindergarten | Pre-Kindergarten |
| Gina | Title I | Administration |
| Kendra | 1st Grade | |
| Patricia | Special Education | 1st Grade |
| Nancy | 6th-12th Grade Science | 6th-12th Grade Science |
| Wendy | 1st Grade | 1st Grade |
| Theresa | 5th Grade | 5th Grade |
| Steve | Government | |
| Rebecca | Title I | Title I |

Table 4 below provides a summary of each participant's grade level assignment (elementary, secondary, or both) and placement on the career continuum (early-career stage, second-stage, or end-stage).

Table 4

Summary of Participant Grade Level Assignment and Career Continuum Placement

| Participant | Grade Level Assignment | Career Continuum Placement |
|-------------|------------------------|----------------------------|
| Chris | Elementary | Early-career |
| Eleanor | Secondary | Early-career |
| Kathleen | Elementary/Secondary | Early-career |
| Rose | Secondary | Early-career |
| Janet | Elementary | Second-stage |
| Gina | Elementary | End-stage |
| Kendra | Elementary | Second-stage |
| Patricia | Elementary | Second-stage |
| Nancy | Secondary | Second-stage |
| Wendy | Elementary | Second-stage |
| Theresa | Elementary | End-stage |
| Steve | Secondary | Second-stage |
| Rebecca | Elementary | Second-stage |

Chris is a 24-year-old male who teaches fifth grade at a public elementary school. He just completed his first year of teaching (early-career stage) and took part in a district-mandated

induction program which required that he work directly with a mentor for a period of one academic year. His assigned mentor was a fellow teacher who taught in the same school building. At the time of this study, Chris' contract had been renewed and he planned to return to the same school in the fall.

Eleanor is a 28-year-old female who teaches mathematics at a public high school. Eleanor just completed her second year of teaching (early-career stage). As a new teacher, Eleanor participated in a district-mandated induction program. The program required that Eleanor work directly with an assigned mentor. The assigned mentor was also a high school mathematics teacher located in the same building. At the time of this study, Eleanor's contract had been renewed and she planned on returning to the school in the fall.

Kathleen is a 26-year-old female who teaches band at an elementary school, a middle school, and a high school in the same public school district. Eleanor just completed her second year of teaching (early-career stage). Eleanor participated in a district-mandated induction program that required that she work directly with a mentor. The assigned mentor was a band teacher, but did not teach in the same location. At the time of the study, Kathleen had signed a new contract and she planned to return to the same school in the fall.

Rose is a 43-year-old female who teaches Family and Consumer Science (FACS) at a public middle school. She just completed her second year of teaching (early-career stage) and had participated in a district-mandated induction program. Rose worked directly with a mentor during her first year of teaching. At the time of this study, Rose's contract had been renewed and she planned to return to the same school in the fall.

Janet is a 54-year-old female who teaches pre-kindergarten in an elementary school that is part of a public school district. Janet works in partnership with this school district and a

regional chapter of the Kansas Cooperative in Education. **Janet** just completed her fifth year of teaching (second-stage) and had participated in a district-mandated induction program that required that she work directly with a mentor. At the time of the study, Janet's contract had had been renewed and she planned to return to the classroom in the fall.

Gina is a 37-year-old female who is not currently working as a classroom teacher. Instead, she is working as a principal in a public elementary school. She just completed her fifteenth year in education (end-stage). **Gina** spent her first six years in the classroom as an elementary teacher, the next six years in administration as a lead teacher, and the past three years in administration as a principal. During Gina's first year of teaching, she was a Title 1 teacher in an elementary school. During this same year, she participated in a district-mandated induction process that required her to work directly with a mentor teacher. This mentor teacher was not located in the same facility. Instead, **Gina's** office was located at the district building and she traveled between multiple schools to work with several different novice teachers in one year. At the time of this study, Gina's contract had been renewed and she planned to return to the school in the fall.

Kendra is a 29-year-old female who worked as a classroom teacher in a public elementary school setting for five years (second-stage). At the conclusion of her fifth year of teaching, Kendra made the decision to leave the field of teaching. In her first year of teaching, she was hired as a third grade teacher and was required to participate in a district-mandated induction process in which she worked directly with a mentor teacher. Kendra was assigned a mentor who worked as an elementary teacher in the same building. At the time of this study, Kendra was working as a director for a local community theater arts program and had no intentions of returning to the classroom anytime in the near future.

Patricia is a 55-year-old female who teaches first grade at a public elementary school. She just completed her ninth year of teaching (second-stage). During Patricia's first year of teaching, she participated in a district-mandated induction process that required that she work directly with a mentor teacher. She was assigned a mentor who worked in the same building. At the time of the study, Patricia's contract had been renewed and she planned to return to the classroom in the fall.

Nancy is a 33-year-old female who teaches general science, life science, physical science, and earth/space science at an accredited secondary private school. She just completed her eighth year of teaching (second-stage). Nancy participated in a school-mandated induction process which required that she work directly with a mentor teacher during her first year of teaching. The assigned mentor worked as a science teacher in the same building. At the time of this study, Nancy's contract had been renewed and she planned to return to the classroom in the fall.

Wendy is a 31-year-old female who teaches first grade at a public elementary school. She just completed her ninth year of teaching (second-stage). Wendy participated in a district-mandated induction process which required her to work directly with a mentor teacher. The assigned mentor was a classroom teacher located in the same building. At the time of the study, Wendy's contract had been renewed and she planned to return to the classroom in the fall.

Theresa is a 36-year-old female who teaches fourth grade at a public elementary school. She just completed her thirteenth year of teaching (end-stage). Theresa participated in a district-mandated induction process which required that she work directly with a mentor teacher during. The assigned mentor was a classroom teacher in the same building. At the time of this study, Theresa's contract had been renewed and she planned to return to the classroom in the fall.

Steve is a 30-year-old male who has had experience teaching government and agricultural education at the secondary level in both the public school and private school settings. His most recent experience was as an agricultural education teacher in a public high school. During Steve's first year of teaching, he worked as a government teacher at the secondary level in a private school. He participated in a school-mandated induction process which required him to work directly with a mentor teacher. Steve had convenient access to both mentors who were located in the same building. At the time of this study, Steve was self-employed as a landscaper. He exited the profession during the second-stage of his professional career.

Rebecca is a 28-year-old female who is a Title I teacher at a public elementary school. She just completed her fifth year of teaching (second-stage). During Rebecca's first year of teaching, she participated in a district-mandated induction process. Rebecca worked directly with a mentor teacher. The mentor was a reading coach located in the same building. At the time of this study, Rebecca's contract had been renewed and she planned to return to the classroom in the fall.

The researcher preferred diversity of participants in terms of gender, ethnicity, and grade level, but placed considerable importance on the years of experience that each participant possessed. Therefore, the researcher did not actively pursue a specific gender, ethnic, or grade level, but instead focused on the recruitment of participants who ranged in years of professional experience. The thoughts, opinions, shared lived experiences, and recollections of teachers from across the career continuum represent thick descriptions of the phenomenon (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Thick descriptions can help to develop supports that positively impact attrition rates among early-career teachers.

Research Methodology and Analysis

The goal of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' perceptions regarding teacher mentor programs during the induction year of service. Learning about these perceptions can assist in broadening understanding about the usefulness of teacher mentor programs in supporting and retaining novice teachers. To achieve this goal, the researcher attempted to recruit current and former teachers who were assigned mentors as part of a mandated induction process in their respective school districts. It was crucial to obtain multiple viewpoints from individuals who were in different phases of their teaching careers in both elementary and secondary settings. The researcher did not exclude those who had left the profession due to retirement or other reasons as long as they met two main requirements. First, the individuals participated in a teacher mentor program as part of formal induction in a state-accredited school. Second, the individuals possessed at least a provisional license during the induction year.

To promote recruitment, the researcher distributed recruitment flyers (see Appendix A) requesting volunteers. First, the researcher displayed the flyers in public spaces. Second, the researcher also posted digital copies of the same recruitment flyer using two social media platforms, Facebook and Instagram. Finally, the researcher sent emails to other teaching colleagues and requested recommendations for potential participants. When a potential participant made contact, the researcher used email communication to send out the initial questionnaire. The researcher used the initial questionnaire, the Potential Study Participant Questionnaire (Q1) (see Appendix B), to determine if the individual qualified for the study. Notably, a former teacher not related to the study reviewed the questionnaire to help ensure that questions were understandable to yield dependable results.

If Q1 indicated that the individual was appropriate for the study, the researcher emailed the Participant Questionnaire Regarding Personal Experiences with Teacher Mentor Programs (Q2) (see Appendix D). The researcher designed Q2 to filter out individuals who did not qualify for the study. Additionally, the second questionnaire provided in-depth opportunities for participants to share their experiences as mentees during their induction year. A former teacher not related to the study reviewed Q2 to help ensure that questions were understandable to yield dependable results. The researcher instructed participants to complete Q2 independently and without assistance. The researcher also instructed participants to return Q2 upon completion with the Basic Consent Form (see Appendix C).

After the participant completed and returned Q1, Q2, and the Basic Consent form, the researcher made contact via telephone or email to schedule one-on-one interviews. The researcher conducted interviews face-to-face unless participants requested telephone interviews. In-person interviews and the focus group took place in convenient setting that provided security and safety. Locations were clean, professional, and provided at no cost to the researcher or participants. Each location also offered ample and convenient parking. On participant request and with prior administrative approval, the researchers conducted one interview in a classroom during non-school hours. Although the researcher preferred face-to-face interviews, the inability to meet in-person did not disqualify individuals from participation. Upon request of the participants, the researcher conducted telephone interviews using the same interview protocol used with in-person interviews.

For transcription purposes, the researcher recorded all interviews with an iPhone 8+ cellular phone using two applications, TapeACall Lite and Voice Memos. The researcher transcribed all interviews within a month and destroyed recordings immediately after.

Additionally, all transcribed material was stored in a secure location in the researcher's home and the researcher was the only one with access to this information. The researcher implemented an interview protocol (see Appendix E) that contained pre-determined questions. A former teacher not related to the study reviewed the interview questions to help ensure they were understandable to yield dependable results. As part of the interview process, the researcher utilized a Participant Biographical Questionnaire (Q3) (see Appendix H) to secure background information and other pertinent information about the participant's past experiences. Consistent with other questionnaires used in this study, a former teacher not related to the study reviewed the questions to help ensure they were understandable to yield dependable results.

The researcher implemented a focus group discussion as a final data collection method. Only four participants elected to take part in the discussion. The focus group took place in a convenient setting that provided security and safety. The researcher recorded the discussion with an iPhone 8+ cellular phone using the Voice Memos applications and destroyed all recordings immediately after transcribing the material. All transcribed material was stored in a secure location in the researcher's home and the researcher was the only one with access to this information. While the researcher guided the discussion, the participants responded to questions directly. The researcher followed a focus group protocol (see Appendix F) that contained pre-determined questions. A former teacher not related to the study reviewed the questions to help ensure they were understandable to yield dependable results.

The researcher emailed all transcribed materials to participants for review and feedback. Each individual had one week to read the material and request changes or corrections using email communication. If participants did not request changes or corrections in the material, the researcher did not require an email response.

The study design was based on a transcendental phenomenological approach. Therefore, the goal was not assign value to collected data as with quantitative studies, nor was it to focus on interpreting meaning of the experiences shared (Moustakas, 1994). Accordingly, the researcher's goal was to deepen understanding of the participants' lived experiences with the phenomenon. A transcendental phenomenological approach involves three distinct processes: (a) epoche, or bracketing, (b) transcendental phenomenological reduction, and (c) imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). In the first process, epoche, or bracketing, the researcher set aside personal biases, assumptions, and beliefs and approached the phenomenon without the encumbrances of preconceived thoughts, opinions, or ideas. In the second process, transcendental phenomenological reduction, the researcher viewed the phenomenon in a new way to develop a totally different textural description (Moustakas, 1994). In the final process, imaginative variation, the researcher viewed the phenomenon from a variety of perspectives to better understand the perceptions and lived experiences of the participants (Moustakas, 1994).

Horizontalization. Initially, analysis of the transcribed material was accomplished through the process of horizontalization (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015). Horizontalization is a systematic data analysis procedure that involves starting with narrow units of meaning and building toward much larger or broader units of meaning (Eddles-Hirsch, 2015). Eddles-Hirsch (2015) described it as a process that requires the researcher to examine the participants' responses and highlighted statements, thoughts, and quotes to form clusters of meaning. These clusters of meaning are then evaluated according to the research questions that guide the study. Horizontalization results in the identification of themes that appear in participants' shared responses.

Coding process. The coding process in a phenomenological study is extensive. In this particular study, coding took approximately four weeks to complete. There are multiple layers

involved that serve different purposes. As with the horizontalization, each stage of the coding process required that the researcher evaluate information and data according to the research questions that guided the study. The researcher employed two First Cycle coding methods – attribute coding and InVivo coding. Saldaña (2009) referred to attribute coding as the grammatical method of coding. Applied in this manner, the term grammatical does not refer to the grammar of language, but to the basic grammatical principles of technique (Saldaña, 2009). Specifically, attribute coding allows the researcher to log essential information about the data and demographic information about the participants to be used at a later time (Saldaña, 2009). Attribute coding is a form of coding that is used in virtually all qualitative studies (Saldaña, 2009).

InVivo coding, a First Cycle coding method, was also used in this study. Saldaña (2009) referred to InVivo coding as the elemental method of coding. This method of coding is most often utilized to build a foundation for future coding (Saldaña, 2009). InVivo coding is also known as literal coding or verbatim coding because the researcher draws from the participants' very own words to develop codes (Saldaña, 2009). The effectiveness of InVivo coding is a process that is intended for virtually all types of qualitative coding (Saldaña, 2009). Additionally, InVivo coding is especially beneficial and useful for those researchers who are novices or who are largely inexperienced (Saldaña, 2009).

The researcher utilized a Second Cycle of coding called Pattern Coding. Miles and Huberman (as cited in Saldaña, 2009) explained that pattern coding is appropriate in the second cycle of coding because it aids in the identification and development of major themes in the data. This type of coding allows for the examination of social networks and patterns of human relationship (Saldaña, 2009). This is especially beneficial in phenomenological studies, which

focus, in large part, on the shared experiences of the participants. In this study, the researcher gained a clearer understanding of the nature of the relationships that existed between mentees and their mentors.

Additional data analysis methods. Creswell (2013) described the amount of information in qualitative research as voluminous and explained that it is nearly impossible to prepare anyone for the overwhelming tasks of data organization and analysis. With that being said, it is important to put into practice certain tools that make the process a little less daunting. For example, qualitative researchers must understand from the start that data analysis should not be view as a fixed linear process (Creswell, 2013). Rather, data analysis should be viewed as a spiral and the first loop in the spiral that begins the entire process is that of data management (Creswell, 2013). Due to the sheer amount of data that is collected, how it is managed becomes equally important as how it is interpreted or presented. Data management includes the very critical step of organizing the data. In this study, the researcher organized the data through reading and memoing of the transcribed information. Creswell (2013) stated that multiple read-throughs of all documents is necessary to get a thorough understanding of the participants' experiences. Each read-through presents the researcher with valuable opportunities to add memos to important pieces of information. Creswell (2013) described these memos as words, short phrases, ideas, and key concepts that emerge from transcribed interviews, focus group discussions, and responses on questionnaires.

Following reading and memoing is the process of describing, classifying, and interpreting the data (Creswell, 2013). In this process, the researcher takes what is learned through reading and memoing and begins to develop codes or categories (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2013) described this as the heart of qualitative data analysis and involves creating larger units of

meaning, or themes, from the existing codes. In this study, the researcher employed constant comparative analysis to help ensure the validity of the identified themes (Beaudoin, 2014).

Constant comparative analysis is a reiterative process that results often results in the development or adjustment of previously established codes, which, of course, calls for the multiple reviews of previously read and analyzed documents (Beaudoin, 2014).

Summary of Findings

Upon analysis of the data, three major themes and eight subthemes emerged. They will be discussed in relation to the three research questions that guided the study. The overall major themes and related subthemes are presented in Table 5.

Table 5

Major Themes and Related Subthemes

| Major Themes | Related Subthemes |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1. District-mandated requirements | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mandatory meetings • Required assignments • Observations and feedback |
| 2. Mentor compatibility | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical accessibility • Approachability • Friendship |
| 3. Mentor capability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge and experience • Preparedness |

Research question 1. How do teachers across the career continuum describe the teacher mentor programs in which they participated as part of formal induction? Each participant in the study described programs that were directed and controlled from the district office. Three subthemes related to the major theme of district-mandated requirements emerged from the data.

The subthemes were mandatory meetings, required assignments, and observation and feedback.

Table 6 below provides an overall summary of the major themes and subthemes related to research question 1.

Table 6

Major Themes and Subthemes Related to Research Question 1

| Research Question 1 | Major Theme | Related Subtheme |
|--|--------------------------------|--|
| How do teachers across the career continuum describe the teacher mentor programs in which they participated as part of formal induction? | District-mandated requirements | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mandatory meetings • Required assignments • Observation and feedback |

Research question 2. How do teachers across the career continuum describe their relationships with their assigned mentor teachers? Understanding the critical nature of a positive mentor-mentee relationship, this question was designed to determine participants' perceptions about their relationships with individuals who were assigned to mentor them over the course of their induction year. The major theme of mentor compatibility and two subthemes of approachability and friendship emerged from the data. Table 7 below provides an overall summary of the major theme and subthemes related to research question 2.

Table 7

Major Themes and Subthemes Related to Research Question 2

| Research Question 3 | Major Theme | Related Subthemes |
|---|----------------------|---|
| How do teachers across the career continuum describe their relationships with their assigned mentor teachers? | Mentor compatibility | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical accessibility • Approachability • Friendship |

Research question 3. What characteristics of the teacher mentor program in which they participated do teachers across the career continuum identify as positive or negative influences on their teaching careers? This question was designed to give participants' opportunity for reflection regarding their mentors and the role they played or did not play in career-related decisions following their induction year. The major theme of mentor characteristics emerged from the data with related subthemes of knowledge and experience, and preparedness. Table 8 below provides an overall summary of the major theme and subthemes related to research question 3.

Table 8

Major Themes and Subthemes Related to Research Question 3

| Research Question 3 | Major Theme | Related Subthemes |
|--|-------------------|--|
| What characteristics of the teacher mentor program in which they participated do teachers across the career continuum identify as positive or negative influences on their teaching careers? | Mentor capability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge and experience • Preparedness |

Presentation of Data and Results

Analysis of the data showed three major themes and eight subthemes. The major themes and subthemes emerged from the shared lived experiences of the participants in direct relation to their involvement in a teacher mentor program as part of formal induction during their first year of teaching. The following sections include detailed accounts and descriptions provided directly from participant responses from questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussion. The first major theme is district-level requirements and the three related subthemes are mandatory

meetings, required assignments, and observation and feedback.

District-mandated requirements. The first major theme is district-mandated requirements. The data revealed that each of the participants in the study indicated that the teacher mentor programs in which they participated included specific district-mandated requirements. While the participants described minor variations in these requirements, there were three common elements that are discussed here as subthemes: (a) mandatory meetings, (b) required assignments, and (c) observation and feedback.

Mandatory meetings. The first subtheme related to theme of district-mandated requirements is mandatory meetings. All participants in the study stated that they were required to attend mandatory meetings as part of a teacher mentor program. Nearly half of the participants recalled having to attend monthly meetings that took place at the district office involving all new teachers and their assigned mentors. For example, Wendy stated, “We did meetings at the board office once a month and it was like from right after school to 5:30 . . . if I remember right.” Two of the participants, Nancy and Steve, who both came from small private schools, attended weekly meetings that involved all new teachers and their assigned mentors. “Steve stated, “We’d meet once a week on Wednesdays and then more often if there was . . . an issue with a student or something like this that was new or interesting.” One participant, Theresa, recalled having to attend monthly district-wide meetings involving first-year teachers without their mentors. She stated, “I remember . . . once a month . . . after school we went to . . . the building on Cloud . . . we had meetings there.” Likewise, Kendra stated that she did participate in district-wide meetings with other new teachers, but these meetings did not occur monthly. Instead, they took place over the course of 2–3 days at the beginning of the school year in what was referred to as a “new teacher academy.”

Only three participants, Janet, Gina, and Patricia, reported that they did not have to attend district-wide meetings. Each of these participants recalled having to meet one-on-one with their mentors, but did not recall having to attend district-wide meetings with other mentees and their assigned mentor teachers. Gina stated, “I was assigned a mentor. She met with me a couple of times . . . it seemed to lack structure.”

Required assignments. The second subtheme related to the theme of district-mandated requirements is required assignments. Over half of the participants recalled having to complete required assignments in-between all-district meetings times. For example, Rebecca stated that her mentor had to “complete little assignments” with her. Theresa stated that she also had to participate in regular activities to “help new teachers become more successful.” Six of the participants did not recall having to complete activities or assignments, whether on their own or with their mentor teachers. For example, Kathleen that while she had to have 62 out-of-school contact hours with her assigned mentor, she did not recall a checklist of assignments to complete in-between meeting times.

Observation and feedback. The third subtheme related to the theme of district-mandated requirements is observation and feedback. All the participants in the study described observation and feedback as an important element of the district-mandated requirements. Each of the participants, as part of a formal induction process, was observed by their mentor teacher at least once each semester. They received immediate verbal feedback on their lessons and activities. Chris received feedback that he found to be extremely helpful and applicable. Chris explained that while he worked slowly, his mentor worked very quickly. He stated:

I went in with a very calm go-with-the-flow pace and he came in and was like alright let’s move on kind of thing . . . That helped me to get more fluent with my lessons, more

comfortable with what I was doing, ‘cause I could see that we were getting more stuff done. He definitely influenced me in the way of my teaching style.

Some received feedback that did not necessarily fit their needs. For example, Kathleen stated:

But I think we have very different, well personalities in general, but also teaching personalities and so sometimes the advice that she would give me or the things that she would say well I did it this way – was just not at all what was comfortable for me or I know it wouldn’t be effective at all if I tried it because it wouldn’t be real . . . I mean compared to how she would have done it. Actual teaching and actual like delivery of content, I don’t feel like it was super helpful.

Mentor compatibility. The second major theme is mentor compatibility. Participants discussed their perceptions regarding mentor compatibility in terms of two subthemes: (a) physical accessibility, (b) approachability, and (c) friendship. Approachability refers to whether or not the participants felt comfortable asking their mentors for help. Friendships refers to the depth of the connection they shared beyond the professional relationship.

Physical accessibility. The first subtheme related to the theme of mentor compatibility is physical accessibility. Each participant in the study mentioned the value of being assigned with a mentor teacher who was located in the same building. For example, Patricia stated, “I stepped right into her room . . . I could get up and go out, but no, I could stop in her office.” Only two of the participants were assigned to mentor teachers who were not located in the same building. One of these teachers expressed frustration at not having their mentor teacher physically accessible on a regular basis. Kathleen stated:

The interesting thing was because – she wasn’t actually in the same building as me . . . Some of those like unwritten procedures and policies and that kind of thing, I actually

ended up going more to teachers in my building – like the art teacher, librarian who I saw a lot more throughout the day . . . I think not having her in the same building as me definitely was more challenging.

The other teacher, however, shared that she did not feel frustration at not having her assigned mentor teacher in the building because she developed a natural relationship with someone who ultimately became an informal mentor to her on campus. Gina stated:

I never hit that frustration because I had one of the teachers I worked with in third grade - she and I became good friends. So, she really became my in-building mentor whether she realized it or not. It was one of those things where it was a natural relationship. It was already there so it wasn't like I was lacking anything.

In both Kathleen's and Gina's responses, there is an indication that not having an on-campus mentor presented its challenges and to overcome these challenges, they found on-campus alternatives who served as mentors to them. In Kathleen's case, she made this official and in Gina's case, it was an unofficial pairing that worked out in her favor.

Approachability. The second subtheme related to the theme of mentor compatibility that emerged from the data is approachability. Most of the participants who took part in the study considered their mentors to have positive attitudes and to be very approachable. For example, when asked to describe his mentor, Chris stated that he was “outgoing . . . always willing to help. He was always helping somebody in the building.” Wendy described her mentor as “very approachable.” Several others had positive experiences to share, demonstrating how willing their mentors were to help and how easy it was to approach them. Rose stated:

And so she was great with getting me started . . . as far as for me, most of it was school things, like how to order papers. Just those small nuances that I wasn't really sure what

to do and so she was great at helping me navigate that and then kind of sticking up for me when things would get piled up on my plate.

Kendra stated:

I think it (the relationship) just grew because I ended up switching to the third grade that next year 'cause there was an opening . . . but I literally got to say in my classroom because third and second were like right next to each other, so I was still neighbors with her the next year, just teaching different grades. But yeah, I felt comfortable going to her even before I decided to take the opening . . . like she was so understanding . . . we ended the first year on great terms.

Gina stated:

She (the mentor) really did come ready to help and if she didn't know the answer she would go find it and she followed up immediately . . . never a ball that got dropped, never one of those things – sorry, I don't know how to help you.

Patricia stated:

I never found her condescending or never found her how do you not know – never did I find her thinking why doesn't she know this or anything. She had great, great personal skills. Great social skills. Really enjoyed her a lot.

There were participants who did not feel as positive about their mentor's compatibility because they saw them as very unapproachable. For example, Rebecca stated that she always felt like she was disrupting her mentor when she needed to approach her for anything.

Eleanor described her relationship with her mentor as complicated and stated:

She was meant to be my go-to person for questions, comments, or concerns, it was difficult to feel like I could ask all my questions knowing she was my department head.

She did not have complete buy-in of the mentor program, seen by not completing activities in a timely manner, providing focused, weekly check-ins with me, or having encouraging things to say about the topics at our monthly meetings.

Friendship. The third subtheme related to the theme of mentor compatibility is friendship. Five participants in particular described a “friendship” with their mentor that extended beyond the school day. For example, Chris shared, “Oh yeah. He’s got a kid. But, the relationship, the friend relationship was definitely there, but when it needed to be mentor/mentee it was definitely there, too.” In the same manner, Rose stated, “. . . my mentor teacher and I are still good friends even though we’re half a building apart from each other and rarely see each other,” indicating that the relationship transformed during the course of the year from strictly mentorship to a genuine friendship.

Kendra stated:

One thing that she did that I really liked was she set me up with social friends within the school. They played Bunko or whatever and she invited me to Bunko and she invited me every month, you know, to meet people. And we’d call these interventions. We’d go out and have pizza and beer. And we would have a group. I think that really helped me. I had never lived in this town. I didn’t know anyone. I feel like that helped me.

Wendy stated:

Oh, yes! She was amazing. She was very approachable. I never felt embarrassed to ask her anything. We had the work relationship, but we also had a relationship outside of school, too, where we would go out and hang out. So, I mean we had a personal relationship plus the work relationship and I think that was really good, too, just because we knew each other so well and on a personal basis, too.

Nancy stated:

Like I said, it changes, yes they were my mentors, but by the end of the year and just how this place works, you know, it's no longer, yeah, they were my mentors, they were my mentors, they were responsible for me. Whatever. It's, you know, that friendship level.

Mentor capability. The third major theme is mentor capability. Participants discussed the specific mentor characteristics that positively or negatively influenced their career decisions following their induction year. These characteristics will be discussed in terms of the subtheme of knowledge and experience and of the subtheme of preparedness.

Knowledge and experience. Most of the participants discussed mentor capability as an important element in their professional development as teachers during their induction year. Participants that felt confident in their mentor's knowledge and experience often ended the year feeling more optimistic than those who had doubts about their mentors. Many of the participants in the study indicated that the mentor's capability had nothing to do with their professional decisions following the induction year. Particularly, participants did not hold their mentors responsible for any career-related decisions. This is the case even in instances when they felt their mentors lacked sufficient knowledge and experience. For example, Kendra, who ultimately left the profession altogether, stated:

I don't think it did. The reason I left, well first of all 'cause this job was like perfect, but it was also stuff that the mentorship program can't prepare you for, I guess, and it's just getting more and more, like your district, the principal tells you exactly what minutes you have to teach . . . and there's no freedom anymore and I just got burnt out from it in just five years . . . I don't know how a mentorship program could help that problem.

Eleanor stated:

I think the relationship definitely weighed on me; if it was solely based on that relationship, I would not have had as successful of a year as I did and I'm not sure how long I would have lasted.

Gina stated:

I think different mentors can be viewed in different ways. There was a formal assigned one in year one. But after that, I think as people, there's some of us that naturally gravitate and find our own mentors . . . I think you find them along the way, but having that mentor for one year, not a make it or break it for me. I think I would have been okay without it.

Three participants believed, however, that their participation in a mentor teacher program with a mentor teacher who was equipped to teach and guide them did influence their future professional decisions in some way. For example, Wendy stated, "I think she has. I think she really pushed to have me move into a classroom . . . so she had a lot to do with the fact that I moved into a classroom."

Janet stated:

Yes. She helped me master all the forms, grand requirements, standardized testing, etc.

Those things make administration happy, so therefore, they liked me and then I had good Relationships with people other than just my mentor.

Rebecca stated, "I had a rough first couple of years. I absolutely feel that if I would have had more support or direction that it could have gone a lot more smoothly."

The data clearly supports the notion that the more capable a mentor, the more supported a new teacher feels. In most cases, this does not make a significant impact on a new teacher's

professional decision-making processes. Still, as evidenced by the data, a mentor teacher's capability can have an overall impact on a young, inexperienced teacher's decisions about career.

Preparedness. The subtheme of mentor preparedness emerged from the data. While most participants expressed having confidence in their assigned mentor teachers' preparedness to be effective, including participants who felt they had good relationships with their mentors, expressed concerns. For example, Patricia, who worked as an inclusion specialist, stated that her mentor teacher only had special education experience and no general education experience. Occasionally, this limitation manifested in her mentor's inability to give her sufficient guidance. Patricia stated:

My mentor had only done special ed and that's one of the problems I see between special ed and general ed. Most of the people are either just special ed or just general ed. So I would come in with okay, but in the general ed classroom this, but no, no, no special ed's priority's this . . . we almost had a difference of opinions about things because as an inclusion specialist my job was to see how to get special ed to seamlessly flow into the general ed classroom and all that . . . there was a difference in that she did not always see both sides of it, having not been on the other side.

Rebecca, who was hired as a Title 1 teacher, recalled that her assigned mentor teacher was new to her position and did not seem prepared to take on a mentee. Rebecca stated:

It was almost like she (her mentor) needed a mentor, also. She was a veteran teacher, sure, but not a veteran literacy coach, so it's a whole new ball game . . . I think we were pretty relieved when it was done.

In review of the data, it can be disclosed that whether mentees viewed their assigned mentors' characteristics as positive or negative had no impact on the decisions they made in

regard to their professional careers. Theresa, who did not have a favorable experience with her mentor teacher, stated, “I don’t think it went either way.” She explained that her relationship with her mentor teacher did not lead her to make a decision to stay in or leave the teaching profession. Others had similar views. There was only one participant who indicated that her relationship with her mentor teacher did impact her professionally in future years. Wendy stated:

I think she has. I think really pushed to have me move into a classroom and she was close to our principal so she had a lot to do with the fact that I actually moved into a classroom. That was really nice to have her as somebody that could say hey she’s really great.

While Wendy did not indicate that she stayed in the profession or made a professional decision because of her relationship with her mentor, she did indicate that her professional career was positively impacted by her mentor teacher. Specifically, her mentor teacher served as an advocate who helped her to move into her own classroom.

Chapter 4 Summary

Chapter 4 presented an overview of this transcendental phenomenological study on teacher mentor programs. The purpose of the study was to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of teachers across the career continuum regarding their experiences in teacher mentor programs as part of formal new teacher induction. Three research questions focusing on descriptions of the teacher mentor programs and the relationships between the mentees and mentors guided the study.

The sample was comprised of 13 elementary and secondary teachers in public and private schools in six different school districts across the state of Kansas located in the Midwestern region of the United States. At the time of their participation in a teacher mentor program as part

of formal new teacher induction processes, all teachers held appropriate Kansas state teaching licensure. All schools and districts in the study were also state accredited. Of the 13 participants, only two had left teaching and were working in other fields when they entered the study.

Triangulation of data was achieved in data collection through questionnaires, interviews, and a focus group discussion. All interviews and the focus group discussion were recorded and later transcribed. Transcripts were sent to participants for member checking. During data analysis, the coding process included two First Cycle coding methods, attribute and InVivo Coding. The process also included one Second Cycle coding method, pattern coding. Since this was a phenomenological study, the researcher also employed horizontalization. Coding and horizontalization was implemented to determine commonalities among participant responses regarding their perceptions of teacher mentor programs, mentor-mentee relationships, and the influence of teacher mentor programs on future career choices and developments.

Overall, this chapter presented a description of the study sample, research methodology and analysis, summary of the findings, and data analysis and results. Further discussion of the data and results will be presented in Chapter 5. The discussion in Chapter 5 will include a summary and discussion of the results as they relate to the literature. The researcher will also present the implications of the results for practice, policy, and theory and will make recommendations for further research.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

Public concern about the United States' growing teacher shortage has focused attention on teacher attrition rates. The impact of high teacher attrition affects both schools and students (Arnup & Bowles, 2016). More concerning than the overall rate of teacher attrition, however, is the rate at which new and beginning teachers leave the field. Studies show that early-career teachers leave the field at higher rates than their more experienced counterparts (Clandinin et al., 2015). Therefore, the need to attract, recruit, and retain high quality new teachers prompted educational leaders and policymakers to consider measures that best support novice teachers. In an effort to support early-career teachers, schools and districts create and implement formal induction processes that utilize teacher mentoring as a primary strategy in addressing the unique needs of new and beginning teachers.

Over the past several years, United States' school systems have increasingly employed formal induction processes that utilize teacher mentoring as means to retain early-career teachers. Castanheira (2016) reported that teacher mentor programs not only curb teacher turnover, but they also enhanced loyalty among mentees to the school community. Le Cornu (2013) found that those who participated in teacher mentor programs encouraged new and beginning teachers to be active participants in their own professional learning and development. As a result, these teachers developed a deeper sense of connectedness with their school community. Taylor (2013) supported the utilization of teacher mentor programs for the purpose building strong, collaborative relationships between mentees and their assigned mentors, which resulted in the resiliency of new teachers in the field.

The implementation of teacher mentor programs in schools and districts across the United

States has not succeeded in eliminating the problem of early-career teacher attrition. Novice teachers continue to leave the field at significantly high rates and the issue of teaching shortages in U.S. schools continues to be a troubling reality (Clandinin et al., 2015; Harfitt, 2015).

Accordingly, the basis of this study, has rested on the researcher's interest in teacher mentor programs as a tool to retain early-career teachers. While teacher mentor programs and new teacher induction processes have been previously investigated, phenomenological research focusing on the perceptions of teachers across the career continuum regarding their own lived experiences as mentees has yet to be explored. Therefore, the researcher's goal was to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of teachers across the career continuum regarding their own experiences in mentoring programs during their first year of teaching as part of formal induction. The enlistment of teachers who had reached different points in their professional careers gave the researcher the opportunity to increase the breadth and depth of study. The hope was to gain insights from a variety of viewpoints in one study, including the viewpoints of those who had just entered the field, those who had entered the second phase, and those who were well-established in the profession.

Chapter 5 provides a summary and discussion of the results as they relate to the literature. It also includes a discussion of the limitations of the study as well as the implications of the results for practice, policy, and theory. Finally, the researcher concludes the chapter with recommendations for further research.

Summary of the Results

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of teachers across the career continuum regarding teacher mentor programs as part of formal induction processes. Specifically, the study focused on the

lived experiences of 13 current and former teachers who were assigned mentors during their first year of teaching. While teacher mentor programs and new teacher induction processes have been previously investigated, phenomenological research focusing on the perceptions of teachers across the career continuum regarding their own lived experiences has yet to be explored. The participants fell into one of three categories: (a) early-career stage, (b) second-stage, and (c) late-stage teachers. Recruiting teachers who had achieved different levels of professional experience provided for a broader spectrum from which to gain deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

The following three research questions guided the study:

- RQ1: How do teachers across the career continuum describe the teacher mentor programs in which they participated as part of formal induction?
- RQ2: How do teachers across the career continuum describe their relationships with their assigned mentor teachers?
- RQ3: What characteristics of the teacher mentor program in which they participated do teachers across the career continuum identify as positive or negative influences on their teaching careers?

An analysis of the data revealed three major themes and eight related subthemes. Each of the three major themes and eight subthemes relate directly to one of the three research questions that guided the study. Table 9 below summarizes the major themes and subthemes and identifies the related research question. Table 9 shows that district-mandated requirements with subthemes of mandatory meetings, required assignments, and observation and feedback relate to RQ1; mentor compatibility with subthemes of physical accessibility, approachability, and friendship relate to RQ2; and mentor capability with subthemes of knowledge and experience, and

preparedness relate to RQ3.

Table 9

Major Themes and Subthemes in Relation to the Research Questions

| Research Question | Related Major Themes | Related Subthemes |
|-------------------|--------------------------------|--|
| RQ1 | District-mandated requirements | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mandatory meetings• Required assignments• Observation and feedback |
| RQ2 | Mentor compatibility | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Physical accessibility• Approachability• Friendship |
| RQ3 | Mentor capability | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Knowledge and experience• Preparedness |

Each of the major themes and subthemes identified here helped to create a detailed description of the lived experiences of the participants. The researcher was able to gain a clearer understanding of not only the structure of the various teacher mentor programs in the study, but also of the nature of the relationships between the mentees and their assigned mentors. Finally, the shared perceptions of the participants gave insight regarding the impact these programs had on the professional careers of the mentees involved.

Discussion of the Results

According to participant perceptions, teacher mentor programs represent a valuable resource to novice teachers, especially during the first year of teaching when the demands of the job can be the most overwhelming. The results indicated that most of the participants of the study described teacher mentor programs that shared similar structural elements in the form of district-mandated requirements. The results also indicated that the participants viewed their

participation in teacher mentor programs as positive or negative based on the compatibility and capability of their assigned mentors.

Conceptual framework and theoretical framework. The conceptual framework for the study focused on high attrition rates among early-career teachers as a primary factor in present and projected shortages in U.S. elementary and secondary schools. For this reason, the researcher focused on the lived experiences and perceptions of teachers across the career continuum regarding teacher mentor programs and the potential impact of these programs on their professional careers. The research questions that guided the study gave participants repeated opportunities to describe these programs in their own words and reflect on the experiences in the program and with their assigned mentors. Participants shared that they appreciated the opportunity to work with a mentor, but their perceived success in such programs did not determine whether or not they stayed in the profession or left the field altogether. While participation in a teacher mentor program may have aided them in feeling supported or in their professional growth, they did not attribute positive or negative experiences to their decisions to stay in their particular assignments or content areas, or to stay working as teachers.

Associated with the conceptual framework of the study is the theoretical framework based on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which views human development through the lens of social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). While Vygotsky's theoretical teachings regarding human development centered on the development of children, much of what he taught could be applied to this study regarding the development of the novice teacher just entering the profession. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory asserts that teaching and learning are socially situated activities that require human interaction (as cited in Bashir-Ali, 2011). This theory supports the findings of the study, especially in regarding to two of the major themes that emerged from participants'

responses – mentor compatibility and mentor capability.

While there are many factors that can affect a novice teacher's personal and professional development during the course of his or her first year of teaching, the single most important factor identified in the study was the mentor-mentee relationship. Specifically, mentees learned directly from their assigned mentors' knowledge and experience, as well as their ability to help them trouble-shoot the challenges they faced in and out of the classroom. But, the marks of a truly successful mentor-mentee connection related directly to the feelings a mentee had about his or her mentor. Participants shared that they learned more when their mentors were physically accessible, approachable, and interacted with them as friends. When these components were in place, participants tended to view their experiences as first-year teachers more favorably than if they did not have strong connections with their mentors.

District-mandated requirements. The participants identified district-mandated requirements as the first major theme. They described teacher mentor programs that included specific required components: (a) mandatory meetings, (b) required assignments, and (c) observation and feedback. Although most of the participants viewed these required components favorably, they also expressed frustration at their impracticality. For example, while the mandatory meetings provided the opportunity to connect and learn from their mentors and other new teachers, the topics presented to them during meetings did not address issues directly related to their current jobs. Instead, participants highlighted theoretical practice, which they perceived as a continuation of their university learning. Re-learning and re-examining educational theory did not help address the struggles the participants experienced in the classroom with teaching content, assessing student achievement, managing student behavior, and a myriad of other tasks that new teachers must learn and address regularly.

Participants viewed the required assignments in the same way. Working on district-outlined tasks and activities in between mandatory meetings was one way to stay engaged with the demands of their profession. Unfortunately, participants considered the assignments to have little or no impact on their ability to perform their jobs. As a result, the required assignments were viewed as “busy work.” One participant, Rebecca stated, “I didn’t feel the program itself was that effective. I felt like it was quite a bit of busy work when the main things we needed was just support from an experienced teacher.”

The only district-mandated component that participants fully embraced was observation and feedback. Participants welcomed the opportunity to be observed, especially when mentors provided feedback. Observation, however, was only welcomed and trusted for professional development, not as a means to highlight strengths or deficits in professional performance. This finding is supported by Eliahoo (2016) who determined that teacher observations for performance management have been found to be damaging because of the potential of the mentor to assume the role of *judging* the mentee. Hobson and Maldarez (2013) referred to this as *judgmentoring*, a situation in which novice teachers feel a high level of stress when observation is clearly being used for performance management.

Mentor compatibility. The participants identified mentor compatibility as the second major theme. Concerning mentor capability, the participants focused on issues directly related to their assigned mentor’s physical accessibility, approachability, and level of friendship. First, the assignment of a mentor who was not located in the same building or on the same campus created challenges for the participants that impeded their professional growth. While many of the participants reported working at the same location with their assigned mentors, three participants noted that they were assigned to mentors located on a different campus. Physical separation had

a negative impact on the relational growth between the mentee and mentor. The inability to access help when she needed it or with regularity motivated one of the participants, Kathleen, to formally request a new mentor and another participant, Gina, to find her own on-campus connection who assisted her in an informal capacity as mentor.

The participants in the study perceived mentor approachability to be a key element in a strong mentee-mentor pairing. Some of the participants in the study described their mentors as unapproachable, which caused them to hesitate to ask questions or ask for assistance. When participants viewed their mentors as unapproachable, they felt isolated. Specifically, participants felt they had few resources to assist them with improving teaching skills, developing content knowledge, or understanding school policies and procedures. Participants viewed these elements as vital to their professional growth during their induction year of teaching.

Several participants described their relationships with their mentors as a friendship. Those who considered their mentors their friends developed a level of trust that opened the door to collaboration and professional growth. The participants described mentors who encouraged relationships and personal connections that extended beyond the work day. For example, one participant, Kendra, recalled that her mentor invited her to social events and introduced her to other teachers in social situations. This helped Kendra to transition into the educational community, which in turn, afforded her more opportunities to connect with people and feel less isolated over time.

Mentor capability. Mentor capability was identified as a third major theme. Participants' perceptions of their mentors were based, in large part, on their knowledge and experience, and how prepared the mentors were to instruct and guide them. Most of the participants relied on their assigned mentor's knowledge base and past professional experiences

as classroom teachers and members of the educational community. Many of the participants felt confident in the mentor's preparedness to help with work-related challenges. In these cases, their confidence in their mentors helped create trusting and collaborative relationships.

Some participants, however, shared that they did not feel confident about their mentors' abilities and this made them feel uncertain, hesitant, or uncomfortable in asking for help.

Rebecca stated:

She was new to her . . . position that year . . . We always got along, but she was definitely overwhelmed with her own new position so I always felt as though I was disrupting her when I needed help. She never said that but I felt that way because I could tell she was overwhelmed! I feel like my mentor experience wasn't the most successful.

Eleanor stated:

. . . but it was difficult to feel like I could ask all my questions knowing she was also my department head. She did not have complete buy-in of the mentor program . . . seen by not completing the activities in a timely manner, providing focused, weekly check-ins with me, or having encouraging things to say about the topics at our monthly meetings.

Based on participants' perceptions of their lived experiences as mentees during their first year of teaching, it is reasonable to conclude that induction processes that include a mentoring component can have a positive effect on novice teachers. The level of growth that participants experience, however, is contingent upon several key components. First, any district-mandated elements must be practical in nature. Activities and other required tasks should directly address potential real-life issues that novice teachers deal with their first year of teaching. Second, the success of teacher mentor programs relies heavily on the mentee-mentor relationship. Participants who described strong connections with their mentors also described overall

induction experiences as successful, despite any negative perceptions they had about district-mandated requirements. Participants who did not have strong bonds with their assigned mentors viewed the overall induction process as ineffective in assisting them in their transition into the teaching profession.

The researcher's intent for the study was threefold: to develop a detailed picture of the structure of the programs, to gain a better understanding of how the participants felt about their relationship with their assigned mentors, and to achieve a clearer understanding of how participation in such programs positively or negatively influence educator careers. Based on participants' perceptions, the researcher concluded that mentees' positive or negative experiences did not determine their decision to stay in or exit the profession. However, this does not mean that participation in a teacher mentor program had no impact on their profession. Participants who shared trusting relationships with mentors finished the year feeling confident about their ability to succeed as teachers. Alternatively, the participants who experienced weak connections with their assigned mentors found other colleagues they could trust.

Mentors play a critical role in the development of early-career teacher confidence and resiliency. Well-supported mentees are better able to overcome feelings of self-doubt and isolation and are more likely to develop effective teaching, management, and collaboration skills. Support to mentees, however, needs to address both professional and personal needs. The findings in this study emphasize the importance of professional needs and personal needs. Curry, Webb, and Latham (2016) described personal needs to include a healthy work-life balance, positive interpersonal relationships, progressive collaborations with colleagues, open-door access to school leadership, and a positive school environment.

Discussion of Results in Relation to the Literature

The idea for this study originated from an initial concern over a potential teaching shortages in the United States. The problem statement acknowledged that although teacher mentor programs can have a positive impact teachers' first year experiences, early-career teacher attrition continues to be a reality (Clandinin et al., 2015). What characteristics of teacher mentor programs do teachers across the career continuum identify as positive or negative influences on educator careers? A review of the literature revealed four recurring themes: (a) mentoring supports that build new teacher confidence and resiliency, (b) importance of mentor-mentee pairing, (c) targeted teacher mentor strategies and, (d) alternative approaches to school-based new teacher mentor programs. This discussion focuses on the two most relevant themes – mentoring supports that build new teacher resiliency and the importance of mentor-mentee pairing.

Mentoring supports that build new teacher resiliency. The results of the study indicated that participants felt more secure and confident in their work when they had a strong support structure, beginning with an accessible and approachable mentor. Participants described strong mentor-mentee relationships that were extended by friendship. Particularly, they felt a deeper connection with their mentors when a friendship formed outside of the work environment. This was evidenced in the descriptions of mentor-mentee relationships that described an open-door policy in which mentees felt comfortable asking for help when they needed it. Importantly, this type of support reduced feelings of isolation and helplessness. Even those who did not share a strong bond with their mentors found other colleagues in the building who they could approach for help and support. Le Cornu (2013) stated that a key component in developing resiliency in new teachers is peer support. Peer support provides valuable sources for emotional support and

opportunities for trouble-shooting problems (Le Cornu, 2013).

Importance of mentor-mentee pairing. The knowledge and experience that a mentor offers is only a part of what makes a mentor a good match for a new teacher. Analysis of the data revealed mentor compatibility as a major theme for participants. Regarding compatibility, the participants identified mentors as compatible when they were physically accessible and approachable. Physical accessibility referred to the assignment of a mentor who was in the same building or on the same campus as the mentee. Mentees and mentors who did not work in the same physical location faced challenges that hindered the novice teacher's professional development.

One participant, Kathleen, described a teacher mentor program that required 62 contact hours between her and her mentor that had to take place outside of the school day. Kathleen's mentor did not work in the same location. When Kathleen realized they would not meet the 62-hour requirement, she asked to be paired with another mentor on the same campus. The change helped tremendously and opened the door to building a mentor-mentee relationship that promoted peer support and professional collaboration. Hobbs and Putnam (2015) emphasized the importance of the mentor-mentee pairing stating that the primary job of the mentor was to build a relationship that is trusting, respectful, and collegial. This is less likely to happen when mentors and mentees have too few opportunities for interaction during a work day. Participants who did not view their mentors as approachable people seemed likely to ask them for help. They either went without having their questions answered or found alternative solutions to their problems that did not require that they asked their mentors for help. One participant, Eleanor, shared that she did not have a trusting relationship with her mentor and that she avoided asking her mentor questions about anything that was not content-based. Hobson and

Maldarez (2013) conducted a study in which they examined the root causes of the failure of school-based mentoring. The researchers found that mentors in the programs under examination failed to create safe, trusting relationships with mentees (Hobson & Maldarez, 2013).

Targeted mentor teacher strategies. Two populations of emerging teachers that would benefit from targeted mentor teacher strategies that address their specific needs. First, the acceleration of teacher preparation and teacher certification programs has resulted in an infusion of teachers into the profession who did not complete traditional university programs. Efforts to create faster routes to teacher certification reflect the desire to fill the numerous vacancies that exist in elementary and secondary public schools across the nation. Those who obtain teaching certification through alternative processes struggle in unique ways in their beginning years of teaching (Hung & Smith, 2012). These young teachers express fear in their own lack of training and inability to manage classrooms effectively (Bang & Luft, 2014).

Second, STEM teachers represent a population of early-career teachers experiencing high attrition rates. National concern for improved instruction in STEM subjects increases demand for teachers in this field in middle and secondary schools (Jones et al., 2016). In past studies, researchers identified some of the needs of novice teachers to include assistance with lesson planning, classroom management, decision-making, and routine school procedures (Jones et al., 2016). In a study examining the impact of one teacher mentor program designed specifically for STEM teachers in the state of Florida, the researchers concluded that induction support for these beginning teachers required focus on assistance in locating resources specifically aimed at instructional strategies in STEM content areas (Jones et al., 2016).

Alternative approaches to school-based new teacher mentor programs. Many new teacher induction programs utilize site-based mentoring as a primary strategy in addressing the

needs of new and beginning teachers. Site-based mentoring strategies include one-on-one guidance between a novice teacher and his or her mentor teacher as well as opportunities for observation and feedback. Professional development at the district level offers these early-career teachers education and training specifically aimed at the needs of teachers in the first year of their professional careers. Site-based mentoring programs present one way to address the unique needs that arise during the first year of teaching, however, these programs restrict the interaction of the mentors and mentees. In an effort to increase collaboration and interaction between mentors and mentees, some schools and districts opt for alternatives to traditional site-based mentoring practices. Two alternative strategies include online mentoring and full-release programs (Fletcher & Strong, 2009; Jones et al., 2016).

Online mentoring offers opportunities for new teachers to access support outside of the school day. Online mentoring provides novice teachers with easily accessible web-based support components such as access to an entire community of educational practitioners, online teaching coaches, and limitless instructional resources (Jones et al., 2016). Online mentoring programs also provide schools and districts with a way to tailor mentoring to the specific needs of their teachers (Band & Luft, 2014). Web-based or online mentoring is not without its drawbacks, however. Jones et al. (2016) reported that over half of the teachers from 18 school districts in the state of Florida involved in online mentoring reported that lack of time was a key factor in limiting their participation. Therefore, online mentoring does not fully resolve the issue of time constraints.

Full-release mentoring is a common alternative to site-based mentoring practices. With full-release mentoring programs, mentor teachers are given the opportunity to mentor novice teachers without the added pressure of running their own classrooms or with limited classroom

responsibilities. While full-release mentoring models provide mentor teachers with the opportunity to focus more time and attention on mentees, these programs are not without restrictions. A school district's financial restrictions often impact how much support a mentor can offer a mentee. In some districts, where financial support is stronger, full-release mentors often have fewer mentees on their caseloads (Fletcher & Strong, 2009). In a study conducted by Fletcher and Strong (2009), students of teachers who were assigned to full-release mentors showed greater gains than students of teachers who were assigned to regular site-based mentors. This suggests the potential benefits of full-release mentor programs.

Limitations of the Study

First, while the researcher emphasized that there was greater importance in recruiting teachers who were in different phases of the career continuum, the study may have benefitted from the recruitment of more male participants. Of the 13 participants in the study, only two were male. The inclusion of more males in the study may have given the researcher additional insight regarding gender-related issues that novice teachers face during induction. The study, however, encouraged participants to share their perceptions about their own personal experiences as mentees and did not reveal any findings that were perceived as gender-specific.

Second, the study was limited to teachers within the state of Kansas. This limitation was a result of the same element serving as a delimitation of the study. That is, the study was delimited to teachers outside the state of Kansas. Therefore, the study was limited to, or only included, teachers within the state of Kansas. Those who participated were all Kansas teachers who completed induction processes at a public or private school in the same geographical region of the United States. This made it more feasible to conduct face-to-face interviews, however, it did limit the study to analysis of teacher mentor programs in the Kansas educational system.

Broadening the recruitment of participants to teachers from other states is achievable through phone interviews, which could still be recorded for transcribing. A potential result of widening the recruitment area is the ability to learn about programs outside of the Kansas educational system. This is important because it also provides greater depth of insight regarding program characteristics that may simply be regional in nature. That is, what may be true of induction programs in Kansas may not be true of induction programs in other states.

Third, the study was limited to the perceptions of teachers who had been mentees in a teacher mentor program as part of formal induction processes. This study did not consider the perceptions of mentors. Understanding mentors' perceptions may have provided for a more detailed description of teacher mentor programs. More importantly, however, the mentors themselves hold a key to the success of the mentor-mentee connection. Foor and Cano (2012) stated that the mentor teacher's perceptions about the roles and responsibilities involved in the mentoring process is equally important as the belief that the mentor teacher has in his/her abilities to have a positive impact on novice teachers.

Fourth, the researcher was unable to recruit more participants for the focus group discussion. Of the 13 participants in the study, only four elected to participate. While the four focus group participants offered valuable insight, additional members may have provided relevant data for analysis.

Fifth, the study was limited to participants who became teachers through traditional university preparation programs. This is viewed as a study limitation due to the growing number of individuals who receive teacher preparation and training using alternative routes. Hung and Smith (2012) described these individuals as older second career seekers that have different support needs than those who received their certification through traditional routes. The

inclusion of teachers who took alternative routes to certification may offer additional insight to induction and mentoring needs.

Finally, as a teacher with over two decades of experience, the researcher used bracketing to study and focus solely on the perceptions of the participants in the study. Since the researcher herself had experience as a mentee in a teacher mentor program as part of a formal induction process, it was important to reduce or eliminate personal bias. Bracketing required the researcher to set aside her preconceived notions and allowed her to more objectively analyze the data from participants' shared lived experiences as mentees during their first year of teaching (Creswell, 2013).

Implications of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory

This section focuses on the implications of the results for practice, policy, and theory. The findings of a single study focusing on the perceptions of teachers across the career continuum regarding their experiences with teacher mentor programs cannot solve the large-scale problems related to early-career teacher attrition. However, the results of the study can indeed have various implications regarding the personal and professional development of teachers during the early-career stage and throughout their careers.

Implications for practice. The findings of this phenomenological study are useful in their transferability to other contexts and situations. For example, the findings of this study support collaboration as a means to develop and grow teacher-leaders. Salgur (2014) recommended mentoring activities for the purpose of supporting novice teachers and for the purpose of teaching experienced teachers to be leaders in the educational community. Building up leaders through placement in mentoring roles helps to affirm the importance of collaboration and dialogue (Salgur, 2014). Salgur (2014) explained that all teachers who effectively

participate with one another in meaningful ways are more apt to stay in the profession because they feel valued and supported. This translates into increased self-efficacy and morale, two important characteristics of teacher-leaders.

The concept of teacher-leadership suggests a more collaborative approach to mentorship. Practices that support and encourage teacher-leadership as a mentoring strategy incorporate activities that bring together communities of learners who work together to complete the induction process (Salgur, 2014). These communities are professional cohorts that engage in open and dynamic discussion and members work through issues related to school policies and procedures, teaching and learning, resources, and support (Salgur, 2014). Through collaborative efforts, veteran teachers build individual leadership skills as they guide the growth process of novice teachers (Salgur, 2014). Activities should include opportunities for reflection, collaboration, and shared inquiry (Salgur, 2014).

Implications for policy. The findings of the study can also be applied to educational policy. Teacher mentor programs and induction processes are not synonymous. Policy needs to reflect a clear understanding of this. An effective new teacher induction process includes a strong teacher mentor program. Mentoring alone does not prepare or support a novice teacher in withstanding the rigors of his or her profession during the first few years. Curry et al. (2016) identified the professional needs of novice teachers to include an orientation to their professional roles, professional development, reduced work-load, access to an attentive and supportive administration, as well as a formal and planned mentorship. Those components combined create a better chance of early-career success than mentoring alone.

The findings of this study support the notion that mentoring and induction of new and beginning teachers must take into account the very personal nature of the profession. Teachers

create and sustain relationships with their students each year, but these relationships are not the only critical connections teachers make. The process of induction must include both professional collaboration as well as opportunities for novice teachers to develop support through friendship with other educators in their school communities. This friendship factor is a key element that connects new teachers to their school communities and indicates to them that they are an integral part of the teaching and learning process.

Implications for theory. The results of the study indeed have implications on theory related to early-career teacher attrition. Theory supports formal new teacher induction processes as a training tool and as a way to increase retention. Theory also supports the idea that teacher mentor programs must be structured and purposeful. Wong, Britton, and Ganser (as cited in Gorneau, 2014) identified effective induction programs as highly structured, focused on professional development and learning, and emphasizing collaboration among all teachers in the school community. What, then, are the implications that the results of this study have on theory? The findings of this study reveal that the participants did not always trust in the practicality of the programs. The results, therefore, suggest that it is not enough to create structurally sound programs. Programs must also address the needs of early-career teachers in ways that are unique to the specific individuals in the programs.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. The findings of this study do not have direct implications to Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, however, they do reflect the basic tenets of Vygotsky's views. Sociocultural theory presents learning as a social interaction. That is, learning occurs through interaction with others, objects, and events in the environment (as cited in Bashir-Ali, 2011). Therefore, it is important to understand the growth and development of novice teachers occur through interactions they with peers and collaborative experiences with

mentors. Induction processes and mentoring programs that aim to produce resilient and skilled teachers acknowledge that learning and growth occur as a result of interactions and experiences with others.

Recommendations for Further Research

Since this study involved only 13 participants, the sample size was relatively small. The researcher recommends further study to be conducted with a larger sample and more diverse population. Increasing the number of participants does not guarantee diversity, so the researcher suggests the inclusion of teachers from across the career continuum who participated in teacher mentor programs as part of formal induction as both mentees or mentors. Additionally, further study should also include administrators and other school leaders who have working knowledge and experience with teacher mentor programs and induction processes. An analysis of their lived experiences with the phenomenon provides for a more detailed description of teacher mentor programs and opens the door to continued collaboration and dialogue. Pogodzinski (2015) found that novice teachers who view administrators as strong supporters and advocates of teacher mentor programs, typically feel more confident to express their support needs to both the administrators and their mentor teachers.

A final recommendation is for further research into the benefits of mentoring programs that allow mentees to choose the supports they need. Although this recommendation is not supported by the data, the researcher sees value in acknowledging the unique needs of individuals. Novice teachers benefit from programs that utilize today's technology to support, train, and transition them into the profession. Although some of the participants in the study expressed frustration at not being able to access their mentors when they needed help, there was no discussion about alternatives to traditional site-based mentoring programs. Bang and Luft

(2013) supported virtual mentoring as a means to save time and extend mentor-mentee connections beyond school hours. Still, not everyone is drawn to online mentoring supports. Additional research into hybrid mentoring programs or programs that include mentors and mentees in the development of tailor-made programs may be an answer to new teacher mentoring and induction processes that are both practical and specific. Perhaps the answer lies in the opportunity for the mentee to self-design a program that works for him or her.

Conclusion

Through this transcendental phenomenological study, I sought to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of teachers across the career continuum regarding their experiences as mentees in a teacher mentor program. Concerned with early-career teacher attrition and shortfalls in the U.S. teaching force, my hope was to gain insight into practices that support novice teachers. While I understood that one study alone could not put an end to early-career teacher attrition, I hoped that learning about their lived experiences with the phenomenon through questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions would afford me the opportunity to share valuable insight with others. Change happens over time and with the efforts of many who bring to the table something different. I assembled a group of participants who represented three different phases of the career continuum. Each phase represents personal and professional experiences that reveal how the phenomenon affected the individual. Their lived experiences provided opportunity to understand the nature and structure of teacher mentor programs as well as their potential benefits and drawbacks. I learned that no one understands those things better than the people who experienced them, but I also learned that it is not only the effect of the experience on the individual, but how they deal with it that contributes to personal and professional growth and development.

The results of this study clearly and concisely answered each of the research questions. First, the participants described teacher mentor programs based on a foundation of district-mandated requirements that included some level of mandatory meetings, required assignments, and observation and feedback. Second, the participants described their relationships with their mentors based on compatibility and addressed issues related to physical accessibility, approachability, and friendship. Finally, the participants revealed characteristics of their teacher mentor programs that may have had positive or negative influences on their professional careers. Through bracketing, I set aside my preconceived ideas and opinions about the phenomenon and analyzed participant responses with a blank slate. In this respect, their responses did not confuse, disappoint, or surprise me. Instead, I was able to listen to what they had to share and drew conclusions based on their examples and descriptions. Evaluation of the validity of their statements never came into play because my goal was to simply develop a better understanding of their perceptions about their experiences with teacher mentor programs.

I did gain new knowledge as a result of the study. The findings of this study support the idea that even if novice teachers have a negative mentorship experience, this does not necessarily result in their decision to leave the classroom or change their job focus. All of the participants stated that their decision to stay in or leave the profession was not result of their experiences in a teacher mentor program. Even participants who had weak or non-existent connections with their assigned mentors did not choose to continue on in teaching or leave the profession because of their perceived lack of mentor support. Effective teacher induction programs incorporate a combination of supports and that teacher mentoring is only one of those support practices. Components of professional development must also be a part of the induction process.

My review of the literature throughout the research process revealed new ways of

thinking about new teacher induction and mentoring that had not occurred to me before this study. One consideration that developed is the idea of mentors aiding in the development of their assigned mentees' professional identity. Shields and Murray (2017) defined professional identity as the competence and confidence a teacher feels about his or her professionalism combined with a sense of belonging to a greater community as well as a critical awareness of the teaching practice itself. It is important to develop professional identity because it gives the new teacher a sense of who they and what they contribute to the profession. Mentors play key roles in the development of a healthy professional identity because they provide potential opportunities for mentees to collaborate in the teaching community. Without these opportunities, the beginning may not gain a sense of who they are and what they are capable of contributing (Shields & Murray, 2017).

The literature clearly supports the idea of authentic connection between mentees and mentors as the critical element in successful mentor teacher programming. In this study, this is communicated in terms of a friendship factor. It is important to reiterate the value, and in many ways, necessity, of the connection between mentee and mentor. More than just collaborative in nature, the relationship they share has the greatest impact when it extends beyond the school day. When mentees and mentors become friends and act in ways that support that personal connection, the mentee experiences the greatest professional benefits. The participants in this study who shared that their mentors became their friends also shared that they felt well-supported at work. This appears to be a key ingredient in the overall success of novice teachers. When they feel as if they have become an integral part of the greater educational community, they tend to trust others enough to collaborate and learn from these collaborations. This is perhaps one of the most important implications for practice.

During this dissertation journey – the entirety of it – I learned from individuals who experienced the phenomenon in terms of what worked for them and what did not. There were similarities in the things that the participants shared with me and with one another regarding their relationships with their mentors and the support they felt or did not feel during that induction year. Their stories offered their personal perceptions about human beings and how growth and learning are affected. Administrators and educational policymakers can create and implement state-of-the-art induction programs filled with the latest and best practices in mentoring and professional development, but if they ignore the practical needs of the unique individuals involved, they potentially miss out on the opportunity to make the most of their training efforts. It is my hope that the findings of this study will assist in promoting continued dialogue about the needs of new and beginning teachers so the educational community can move closer to developing consistent support systems that will aid in the decrease of early-career teacher attrition rates.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

VOLUNTEERS WANTED

for a Research Study at Concordia University

WHAT IS IT?

A STUDY THAT SEEKS TO EXPLORE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF NEW AND BEGINNING TEACHER MENTOR PROGRAMS AS PART OF FORMAL INDUCTION PROCESSES IN ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS.

WHAT IS THE GOAL?

This study seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of teachers across the career continuum in elementary and secondary schools regarding the effectiveness of teacher mentor programs as part of formal induction processes.

WHAT IS THE RESEARCH PROTOCOL?

A questionnaire, a one-on-one interview, a focus group, and journaling will be used to collect information on the perceptions of participants regarding the effectiveness of teacher mentor programs as well as perceptions they have about their own personal experiences as new teachers in a new teacher mentor program as part of formal induction.

Prospective participants must have a current 5-year professional teaching license in Kansas and must be an elementary or secondary school teacher in ABC or XYZ District. He/she must have participated as a new teacher in a new teacher mentor program as part of formal induction.

Retired teachers, teachers who have left the profession, and teachers of special programs are not excluded from the study as long as they possess a current 5-year professional license in Kansas and have also participated as new teachers in a new teacher mentor program as part of formal induction.

If you are interested in taking part in this study, please contact: Kim Werth, Doctoral Candidate, Principal Investigator [phone redacted] or email [email redacted] Concordia University - College of Education.

Appendix B: Potential Participant for Study Questionnaire

1. What is your full (first and last) name?
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your birthdate?
4. What is your current age?
5. Do you currently hold a regular teaching license in the state in which you are currently employed as a teacher?
6. What is the name of the school at which you currently teach?
7. In what district is your current school located?
8. How many years have you been at your current assignment?
9. How many years total have you been an elementary or secondary teacher?
10. What is the name of the school where you taught your first year?
11. In what state and district is the school located where you taught your first year?
12. Did you participate in an induction program in your first year of teaching?
13. As part of your first year induction program, were you assigned a mentor teacher?
14. Does your current school assignment have an induction process that includes a new and beginning teacher mentor program?
15. Are you potentially interested in participating in a study about new teacher mentor programs?

Appendix C: Basic Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

Research Study Title: A Phenomenological Study on Teacher Mentor Programs

Principal Investigator: Kim T. Werth

Research Institution: Concordia University

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Floralba Arbelo-Marrero

Purpose and what you will be doing:

The purpose of this research study is to gain a deeper understanding of the perceptions of teachers across the career continuum regarding teacher mentor programs as part of formal induction processes. Your participation in the study will not affect your status as an employee in your current school district.

Participants will take part in one or two one-on-one interviews. Each interview should last between one and two hours depending on how much is shared. Participants will also participate in one focus group discussion with other study participants. This focus group discussion will last between one and two hours depending on how much is shared. Participants will be asked to complete an open-ended questionnaire regarding their personal experiences as mentees in a new and/or beginning teacher mentor program.

During both the interviews and focus group discussions, participants will be asked open-ended questions. These will both be recorded for the purpose of data collection. At any time during the study, participants may skip any question that makes them feel uncomfortable. Pseudonyms will be used to protect participant identities and that of any other individual named in the interviews and discussions.

You will be emailed a summary and transcripts from both interviews and focus group discussions. You may then edit the transcripts if you would like for clarity or to redact any statements you are uncomfortable having shared in the final report and subsequent disseminations.

Risks:

Although minimal, participants may experience emotional discomfort recounting stories related to your past experiences. There could be adverse impacts of the information you share such as embarrassment or harm to your reputation should your identity be deduced. Some of the protections against your identity being deduced include conducting interviews off-site, removal of your name and other identifying data, and specific information about where you have worked or currently work will not be included in any reports. As a participant, you may refuse to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

Benefits:

If you decide to participate, there may be no direct benefit to you. Your participation has the potential to help educational leaders in U.S. public schools to improve teacher mentor programs to better meet the needs of new and/or beginning teachers. It is hoped that through your

participation in the study that you will build networks with other educators that have had similar experiences as you.

Confidentiality:

This information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential. The only exception to this is if you tell us abuse or neglect that makes us seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety.

As a researcher, I am committed to protecting your identity. In the event you share personal and unique story information, I will withhold specific information such as your legal name. In addition, any information about third parties such as teachers will not include their name. Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information. Your name, schools, and identifying information will be removed from all documentation to assure the confidentiality of your participation.

Although confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, we will do our best to make sure your identity is protected.

Right to Withdraw:

Your participation is greatly appreciated, but we acknowledge that the questions we are asking are personal in nature. You are free at any point to choose not to engage with or stop the study. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating. If at any time you experience a negative emotion from answering the questions, we will stop asking you questions.

Questions and Contact Information:

You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have questions you can talk to or write the principal investigator, Kim Werth, at [email redacted]. If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the director of our institutional review board, Dr. OraLee Branch (email obran@cu-portland.edu or call 503-493-6390).

Your Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I volunteer my consent for this study.

Participant Name

Date

Participant Signature

Date

Investigator Name

Date

Investigator Signature

Date



Investigator: Kim T. Werth email: [email redacted]
c/o: Professor Dr.Floralba Arbelo-Marrero
Concordia University–Portland
2811 NE Holman Street
Portland, Oregon 97221

**Appendix D: Participant Questionnaire Regarding
Personal Experiences with Teacher Mentor Programs**

1. Describe the nature and structure of your teacher mentor program as you remember it.
2. Describe your mentor teacher.
3. What was your relationship with your mentor teacher like?
4. In what ways, if any, did your mentor teacher help you during your induction year?
Explain.
5. In what ways, if any did your mentor teacher help you to grow professionally during your induction year?
6. What did you learn from your mentor teacher during your induction year?
7. What strategies did your mentor teaching use to help you through a particularly challenging event that occurred during your mentor year?
8. Do you believe your relationship with your mentor teacher having any bearing on whether or not you continued to teach? Explain.
9. In your experience, what were the benefits of having a mentor teacher assigned to you as part of the new teacher induction process?
10. In your experience, what were the drawbacks of your particular teacher mentor program?
11. What were the main ways in which you and your mentor communicated?
12. What would you keep the same about the teacher mentor program in which you participate?
13. What you change about the teacher mentor program in which you participated?

Appendix E: Interview Protocol

Script:

Hello. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study about new teacher mentor programs. The purpose of this interview is to learn about your personal experiences as a mentee in a new or beginning teacher mentor program during your induction year as an elementary or secondary school teacher. There is no right or wrong answer. I simply want to learn about your experiences as a new teacher in a teacher mentor program. If at any time, you do not want to answer a question, you may decline to answer it. I will be recording this interview in order to generate data for the study. Your responses are confidential and I will be using pseudonyms in my report to protect your identity. Do you have any questions for me before we get started?

Biographical Information:

1. What pseudonym would you like to use?
2. Why did you choose this name?
3. Tell me a little about yourself.
 - a. Where are you from?
 - b. Describe your family.
4. What is the grade level of your current assignment?
5. How long have you been in your current assignment?
6. How long have you been a teacher?
7. What motivated or inspired you to become a teacher?

Mentor Program:

8. How would you describe the teacher mentor program in which you participated?
9. What were the most significant benefits from being assigned a mentor?

10. What drawbacks, if any, did your mentor program possess?
11. What were your preconceived ideas about the teacher mentor program and how did these preconceived ideas compare to the reality of your experience?
12. What contribution, if any, did your participation in this teacher mentor program make toward helping you to decide to continue on in your profession?

Relationship with Mentor:

13. Describe your mentor teacher.
14. Describe your relationship with your mentor teacher.
15. What strategies did your mentor teacher use in guiding you that you found most helpful?
16. What strategies did your mentor teacher use in guiding you that were not especially helpful to you?
17. Describe the communication protocol between you and your mentor?
18. What was your relationship with your mentor like at the end of your induction as compared to the beginning of your induction year?
19. What influence, if any, did your mentor have in your decision to continue on in your teaching career?

Appendix F: Focus Group Protocol

Script:

Hello everyone. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study focus group. The purpose of this focus group is to learn about your experiences as a new teacher who participated in a new or beginning teacher mentor program as part of formal induction processes. You do not have to say anything that makes you uncomfortable. Again, the point of this focus group is to learn about your personal experiences as a new or beginning teacher in a teacher mentor program, so whatever you have to share is welcomed in the study. Please be respectful of each person here. Allow everyone to share without interrupting. I will be here to provide talking points, but I will not be participating in the actual sharing. I will be recording the conversation for the purpose of generating data for the study. I will, of course, use your pseudonym to protect your identity. Please remember that anything that is shared in this focus group is confidential.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. Introduce yourself using your pseudonym.
2. Tell the group a little about yourself.
 - a. What grade do you currently teach?
 - b. How long have you been a teacher?
3. What was it like to be a new teacher in your school?
4. Describe the teacher mentor program in which you participated.
5. Highlight what you consider to be this program's strengths.
6. Highlight what you consider to be this program's weaknesses.
7. Describe your relationship with your mentor teacher.
8. In what ways did your mentor teacher help you in your induction year?

9. Describe the teacher mentor program at your current school.
10. Highlight what you consider to be this program's strengths.

Appendix G: Bivens' Interview Protocol Form

Script:

Thank you for participating in this research project. The intended purpose of this interview is to learn from our academic experiences while enrolled in community college. During this interview, you have the right to decline answering any questions that you are uncomfortable with. I am recording our conversation for the purpose of generating data for this research. Your responses are confidential and I will use pseudonyms in this report to protect your identity.

What questions can I answer for you?

Biographical Questions

1. Please use a pseudonym, a name that represents you in this study for publications and presentations. Why did you choose that name?
2. Tell me a little bit about yourself
 - a. Where from
 - b. Family
3. Why did you decide to go to college?
4. Was there anyone that influenced your decision to go to college?
 - a. Whom?
 - b. How did they influence you?
5. When did you first enroll in college?
6. What was your major when you first enrolled?
 - a. Are you currently in the same major?
7. Why did you decide to enroll into _____?

Experience and Retention

1. What has it been like being a Black woman at this community college?
2. How aware of you of your race and gender on campus? Or the race and gender of others around you?
3. How would you describe your experiences as a _____ student?
4. Was there a specific professor, program, student organization, or other service that played a role in your decision to return to college this semester?
5. Is there a specific professor, program, organization, or other service that played a role in your decision to stay at this community college?
 - a. Who/what and how did it influence your decision to stay at _____?
6. What made you come back to college this semester?
 - a. Did anyone in particular contribute to your decision to come back this semester?
 - b. If yes, how did that person impact your decision to come back this semester?

Appendix H: Participant Biographical Questionnaire

What is your name? _____

What is your age? _____ What is your gender? Male _____ Female _____

In what city, state, and county do you live? _____

Are you a teacher? _____

If yes, how many years of experience do you have? _____

If yes, do you hold a current teaching license in the state of Kansas? _____

If not in Kansas, in which state do you hold a current teaching license? _____

Are you currently employed as a teacher? _____

If yes, what grade/subject do you teach? _____

If yes, in what district/school do you teach? _____

If no, in what year did you last teach? _____

If no, what grade/subject did you last teach? _____

If no, in what state/district/school did you last teach? _____

If no, have you left the profession altogether? _____

If you have left the profession altogether, to which field have you changed? _____

Did you ever participate in a teacher mentor program as a new or beginning teacher? _____

If yes, was this program part of a new teacher induction process? _____

If yes, are still employed by the same district where you participated in the teacher
mentor program? _____

Appendix I: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously- researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

Statement of academic integrity.

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

Explanations:

What does “fraudulent” mean?

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

What is “unauthorized” assistance?

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

Statement of Original Work (Continued)

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University–Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*



Digital Signature

Kim T. Werth

Name (Typed)

February 20, 2019

Date